

DREAMHOUSE IN GREECE 5: 2012 - 2013

January/February 2012

The new year starts well as we receive pictures of the works on the swimming pool. The filter has been installed, it only looks as a matter of connecting the lamps and painting the last spots and then it can be filled with water. The terrace surrounding it also shows some progress, we see. At the end of this month the wooden cabin will be delivered. I'm glad we go down there in April for three months so we are able to be at their backs more often. Of course there is the usual request for advance payment of the last term and of course we compromise.

I order seeds for our vegetable garden and flower bulbs for R. to thank her for her caring for the little fig trees while we were not there last summer.

When we meet the larger part of the παρέα at the gathering for G.'s deceased father we learn that Thanassis and the two Takises have travelled to Blankenberge recently to meet D.'s brother in law to contemplate on the possibility of opening a Greek restaurant over there. We doubt the feasibility of such a project since Belgium is also hit by the Eurocrisis.

R & D let us know that they will spend Easter Holiday on Samos. H & J will not and G & D are waiting how matters with G.'s mother will develop. She likes to travel, we learn, she still is in good health at the age of 82. One of these days she might join G & D to come to Samos. Son in law J. of H & J will be there in May to continue painting their house.

F's former colleague and neighbour B. informs us that he and his wife E. would like to come to Samos during the May Holidays, but they would like to stay in Thanassis' apartment. We make a reservation for them and recommend Sandy of Yes-Rent-A-Car for hiring a small car.

We book us a return flight Samos - Düsseldorf vv. for the summer. For the remainder we keep ourselves busy with cancelling subscriptions and advancing regular payments and appointments which usually take place in the period April - June. As I enjoy my pre-retirement sabbatical leave, we organise all this from within our warm house in this just-not-cold-enough-for-an-Elfstedentocht-time. I quit following the discussions in the media about Greece some time ago; everyone has a different opinion. We'll see what happens, θα δούμε, we can't influence what Frau Angela Merkel decides. Nor what crazy Greek politicians decide to push the Greek over the edge any further.

After some snow in January we see on the internet that another large snow pack covers the Kerkis mountain at the end of February.

March 2012

Finally March has arrived. Departure time approaches. March is the month to arrange our daily business affairs during the three month's absence. To estimate what free space and weight is left over, I start with packing the suitcases with our newly bought stuff. There still is room for a Senseo clone. And, for my plan to take a picture of the sunset every day, and to make a panoramic picture from it, I buy a new small camera. Furthermore, since I plan to make a video on every day life around the house, I download some animal sounds in case the owl and the rock partridges, amongst others, decide to shut up while the camcorder is rolling.

I pack the swimming pool pole and some other long thin objects which don't fit into a suitcase attached to it, into plastic foil and duct tape. This I do for the transportation to Piraeus in the minivan. It looks solid, if I may say so.

We arrange a meeting with G & D to collect our car keys and papers. Due to the illness and the decease of G's father that still had not happened yet.

Then suddenly we receive a message that the Greek restaurant in Blankenberge is definitely opening at Easter and that Thanassis and his whole family will all leave for Belgium on the 1st of April. The taverna on Samos will stay closed for the summer since they make not profit out of it due to the new high taxes. As they still have not finished the odd jobs around our house, we decide that I will fly to Samos at the end of March for a week, to speed up matters. So I pack some thick sweaters and pants and leave for Samos in the early morning of March 20th. F. will stay behind since we also had hired some workers for the garden in Maastricht.

Monday 19-03-2012

So nothing might happen for a long while and then suddenly I find myself on an airplane to Samos three weeks earlier than planned. Our controller/handyman/taverna-chief has gotten it into his head to open a Greek restaurant in an empty beach pavilion of R.'s brother in law at Blankenberge, Belgium, together with his whole family. They want to open in with the Easter school holidays so Thanassis, his wife Roula, son Takis and son-in-law Big Takis will fly over there on the 1st of April. Daughter Soula and daughter-in-law Despina will follow later with the (grand)children when school is done. For several reasons we have great misgivings about the entire plan. We also do not follow Thanassis' remarks that the entire profit of the always crowded taverna Bella Vista goes to the Greek Tax Department....

So our "own" little eatery will stay closed next summer, but there are also some odd jobs we agreed on with Thanassis which still haven't been finished. To evaluate them and to put up the pressure a little in a subtle way F. and I decide that I will fly over in person before April 1st. F. will stay in Maastricht because we also arranged with some handyman to do some odd jobs over there as well for the second half of March.

The mere announcement of my advanced arrival already causes matters to speed up: the last part of the swimming pool suddenly has been painted and the terrace surrounding it appears to be finished as well. Still remaining is the issue of the wooden cabin; maybe the prospect of cash payment might lure them into some action. If only it has been delivered, then we can always ask ever dependable Albanian Aris to put it together.

The weather forecast for my early week Samos are outstanding so after a few days of early spring in Maastricht I cheerfully board the train to Schiphol Amsterdam Airport.

Tuesday 20-03-2012

After some 20 hours mostly spend on hanging around and waiting I set foot on Samos again. I cannot find our car on the parking lot at first, since it is not parked next to our neighbour D.'s car but somewhat further away. After I connect the battery again it hums smoothly into action as I turn the ignition key. On the road I notice the fuel price: €1,89 per litre Euro 95. Phew, let's see if the nice gas man at the intersection to Marathokampos has a lower price!

As I reach the exit to Neo Chori the sun still is high in the sky so I pick the short cut, the steep little road down. When I roll down I notice the many flowers: lots and lots of big daisies, bright lilac anemones and little yellow irises. Tomorrow I'll come back to take some pictures! As I pass R.' & D.'s house I see that the windmill has been put straight again and is spinning. I stop at the taverna but neither Thanassis nor Roula are at home; I assume they might be at their vegetable garden (which they are as I hear later on).

When I drive down the access road of our house I do not believe my eyes: the swimming pool is ready, filled to the brim with water, inviting swimmers to join in! I open the shutters of the windows; outside the temperature is nice but inside the house it really is chilly. I do not unpack but instead take out some folding chairs to watch the sunset on the terrace. Okay, I do put on a sweater, but it's still March After that I clear away all the luggage and the covers of the furniture. I watch tv; the pole with the satellite receiver on it has been immobilised in the concrete of the terrace so it has not moved out of reach of the signal.

After the electric blanket has preheated the bed to a comfortable temperature I go bed to catch on with the sleep - but not after the owl has wished me goodnight through the opening of the window.

Wednesday 21-03-2012

At seven o'clock I am wakened by the loud quacking of the rock partridges. When I get out of bed to fetch my videocamera to record the sound, they notice, so when I return they have shut up for the day. I return to sleep and awake again at nine.

I begin the day by starting the laundry machine with the covers of the furniture and a big run with the vacuum cleaner. Although it seems as if Roula has had a go at it some days ago - it is not extremely dusty (this proves to be true I find out later). But it is already half past ten as I get into the car and, after some shots of some nice flowers, make my first stop at the taverna. Only Roula is at

home and she knows nothing about new bills for us. So I call Takis and he tells me that tomorrow he and his father will drop by our house.

The fuel tank is filled at the gas station of the nice man at the intersection to Marathokampos and then I head for Karlovassi. At the Vodafone shop it is again an old fashioned long wait until headquarters at Athens approves of our renewed internet connection. In the meanwhile I do some shopping and visit the ATM. There is another new Chinese shop with cheap clothes. Eventually Headquarters gives us the green light and I move on to my next stop: the Lidl supermarket, but not after I have disposed of my glass and plastic bottles at the only recycling unit on the island since one year, at the capital Vathi.

At the Lidl's I stock up the trolley with lots of food so we will have enough for some two weeks. I forgot the frozen coolers but I am convinced that the isolating cool-boxes I brought with me will be sufficient at this environmental temperature of some 18 degrees Centigrade, even for the strawberry ice cream.

After that I drive to Pythagorion. The terraces at the old harbour still are abandoned. Only Granny Dimas' supermarket is open (I do not need anything anymore, she charges outrageous prices for tourists) and Robinson's. So I have a late lunch/an early dinner on an always tasty pitta with gyros.

Last stop of the day is the steep road from Neo Chori where I take my time to take pictures of the lilac anemones and the yellow irises. The hoopoe is present but flies away at full speed, again.

Back home the cupboards, refrigerator and freezer are filled to the brim with all the groceries. There is still ample time left to admire the sunset in its full glory. I watch it together with a black-and-white cat who later kindly accepts the tray with a nibble of dry cat food.

Later that evening I make a loaf of bread in the bread machine and bake two apple pies. I end the day with connecting the computer to the internet, all be it via some workaround. I am able to send the first pictures of the pool "back home".

Thursday 22-03-2012

I have merely put out the big drying rack for the sheets when Thanassis and Takis already arrive. First we taste the apple pie and then Takis shows me how to take good care of the swimming pool. I record it with the videocamera so I can show it to F. later on. They will provide us with a stack of disinfectant hypochloride tablets. Takis had put 2 extra tablets on the floor of the pool at the start of the filling, but when I move one to quicken its dispersal, I see that the paint of the bottom of the pool underneath it has discoloured. Note to myself: next year put the extra tablets on a stone platter and then put that on the floor of the pool. We add water to the pool and I am reprimanded not to have cleaned the pool from the insects afloat, yet. I show Thanassis and Takis the little sprinkler computer we bought which we shall try out before the summer period when we are absent.

Besides the promised orange and lemon tree and some ornamental plants Thanassis also has madeus a little vegetable garden with onions, lettuce, parsley, celery and strawberries, and a sprinkler system between the yet small plants.

The wooden cabin will (probably) be delivered somewhere in summer, and they promise to put it up when they have returned from Blankenberge at the end of September. When I ask if Aris might be available when some odd job must be done, Takis answers me that I first should call him on his cell phone and he will contact Aris then. Seems rather intricate to me, so I'll have to see if I will follow that procedure.

When I jokingly remark that they will not be present at the long postponed pool party, to celebrate F.'s 65th birthday (and his state pension), they fire back with the remark that if so, we should organise a second pool party when they have returned from Belgium. Hm, we'll see, θα δούμε.

As the leave I present them with some reviving liquid and an apple pie for the wives and children. On which they offer me a box filled with vegetables out of their vegetable garden, home made olive oil and eggs from their chicken. Πω πω that will require some lengthy eating to clear it all away. I'd already bought greens at the greengrocer's in Karlovassi. Where possible I make rations and put them in the freezer for the παρέα.

In the afternoon I drill a hole in a spare broomstick and with a long nut and bold I attach the scoop to it. With that contraption I clean the surface of the pool from insects some two times that day.

In the evening I am visited by the black-and-white cat and another one with a somewhat mothy angora fur. For both dinner is served on the terrace.

Friday 23-03-2012

The internet has quitted, and after some reasoning with myself I deduct that yesterday I was using the one day free trial. The sim card from the contract refuses to connect so I drive to Karlovassi again. When I drive past Maria's, the hairdresser, I see that it is open so D. may be reassured that she still will be able to go there. At Vodafone the lady reports that we are just connected today so it should be no problem. Otherwise I will have to do a software upgrade.

When I drive back I take the country road and to my surprise a small photovoltaic park has been built there. A little bit further down the road I stop to take some more pictures of the flowers. I also try to film the rock partridges but they are very shy.

During the day I try to connect to the internet several times, in vain. When I use the internet connection of my cell phone to nose around I find that it indeed might be due to the new operating system of my laptop and that I must indeed perform an upgrade on the software of my USB modem. Well, good to find out now so I can do it back home next week. An upgrade in Dutch seems much easier to me than an upgrade in Greek. I will text the rest of the week till I get back.

By the way the (telephone) sim card of the Greek cell phone now is able to give access to mobile broadband data as well. But since I do not know the price per MB, I scarcely use it.

I start on the window shutters and remove the spiders nests and cobwebs. But again it appears to me that Roula might have beaten me to it too some time ago.

When I test the sprinkler system for the vegetable garden I hear a car honk its horn. When I look up the man in the little jeep drives by to feed his dog down at the seaside, as he has done every day for the three years we live here now. Never he has greeted us but now he gives me a big wave. Blimey, did we pass some test?

Saturday 24-04-2012

Toady I occupy myself with the removal of the weeds at the edge of the terrace. If you just let it grow it will break up the tiles eventually. So I dig it out. The soil still is relatively loose so it is not really a big deal. But after some hours my back starts aching so I spend the rest of the day idle, in a chair in the sunshine on the terrace, lazy.

I contemplate the plan to make a small garden with indigenous plants on the spot where we had first planned the vegetable garden, at the back of the house, half sunshine and half shadow. So far the see onion which I planted there last year survived winter. The mediterranean thyme seems dead, but when I cut back the branches I see some green in the middle. The succulents the neighbours gave we also survived, but actually they aren't indigenous.

The fig trees have started to grow new leaves like their big brothers at the neighbours. I water them from time to time. Under the olive tree near our bedroom I perceive a rosette of leaves which might become "our" orchid again. Under another olive tree I see a beginning of an arum. The big caper plant on the passage to D's ground has disappeared, did Aris tear it out? On the lower terrace I cut back another big caper plant at the back of the concrete platform for the wooden cabin. With thick gloves covering my hands, since the mean thorns have stayed on the bare branches. In the axils new shoots are already growing.

In the evening the temperature is still nice so I go outside several times to watch the rising moon and the stars. Orion is clearly visible, but not the Milky Way. Is it only possible to see it in summer?

Sunday 25-03-2012

I continue on the weeds at the terrace edges, accompanied by salutes from Marathokampos to honour Independence Day. Even at the new terrace around the swimming pool weeds have started to grow already. Along the catwalk they stand knee-high. That will be something for next month, I decide.

After I've rested again I clean out the openings between the windows and the shutters with a small brush and the vacuum cleaner. I also collect a mixed zoo from the pool. One stays on my hand and

angrily bites me. Note to myself: ask R. how to discard scorpions from the scoop in a safe way, when in season.

And finally Stamatis and his wife Aphrodite turn up on the road in their green tricycle. He honks enthusiastically and they both give me a big wave.

Monday 26-03-2012

Today I get up early because there is a sale on lawn trimmers at Lidl's; they open at 8 o'clock and it is a 45 minute drive. On the way up I pick up some Petros for a ride to Pythagorion. He's from Albania, just like Aris. He knows Thanassis and the lot and I am able to explain to him where our house is situated - in Greek, not in Albanian.

When I'm done at Lidl's I return to Pythagorion and see, our friend Manolis has opened his terrace. It is a hearty welcome. At some tasty cappuccinos I read the messages and news items on my iPhone through their Wifi. I email a picture of the terrace in the sunshine to tease the folks back home. Although spring has also started there it is not as nice as over here!

After that I drive to Karlovassi to say goodbye to Takis and Big Takis - their wives and children will follow them on the 10th of June when school is done (until September 15th). Takis gives me the cell phone numbers of the ladies and he writes down what type of whitening we must buy when we want to whitewash the outside walls of our house in summer.

Back home I assemble the lawn trimmer but then I find out I cannot test it - electricity has gone down for the first time this week. When I look on the timer of the filter of the swimming pool I see that it has been down since half past 8 - oops my freezer is filled with frozen meat! When at three o'clock the electricity still is down I drive over to Thanassis and see - that helps for when I arrive there it is back on. We say goodbye and I wish them Καλή τύχη στο Βέλγιο - lots of luck in Belgium. I promise that we will drop by in Blankenberge next summer. Aris is sitting at their kitchen table - he will stay here. "Don't give him coffee, all he wants from time to time is a μπυράκι (a beer)" Thanassis jokes.

After that I take a stroll to the three neighbouring houses uphill for some more shots of flowers. I discover a new type of yellow orchids. When I am uphill Thanassis and Roula drive past to check on the houses there. I continue down to the seaside and back. Lots of flowers on my hard disk. I consider the fact that sorting the flowers by colour is not enough - I should sort them by month as well.

Back home I do another run of the laundry machine and turn in early. I have to leave for the airport at a quarter past five tomorrow morning.

April 2012

Waiting together at an airport takes less time than when you have to wait on your own, I find out. Therefore we still are quite fit when we arrive at our house.

The next day we start with a visit to the Vodafone shop in Karlovassi because our internet connection still does not work. After about an hour filled with discussion about Apple computers, operating systems, software updates and trials the lady calls the technical service in Athens and see: within seconds the problem is fixed. Next, we say hello to our friends Manolis and Effi from the Kalokairi Bar in Pythagorion. After a frappé we pick up neighbours R. and D. from the airport; in the evening the four of us have dinner in the restaurant in Ormos that remains open throughout the year. They serve delicious little fishes, μελλούνες, picarels, which we order every next time we are there. Before they left, R. tells us, he found time to go and see Thanassis and his family in Blankenberge to give them the thumbs-up.

Rain is expected for the next week so we start with the outside jobs. The new lawn edge trimmer proves its value for cutting the greens around the house. You only have to remove thick thistles and dandelions with a pair of trimming shears beforehand. The plants at the edges of the terraces however won't come out anymore. Probably it hasn't rained in the 10 days I was away because the soil is as hard as a rock. Well, that'll have to wait till after the rain. I sow some vegetables and herbs; most of them directly out in the open.

The swimming pool robot turns out to be a jolly good chap that cleans the walls and the floor of the swimming pool spotlessly. It first moves around for about a quarter of an hour to measure the pool and store it in its memory. We follow it like children who witness a working laundry machine for the first time. We cannot detect any logic in the way it moves around but after three hours the swimming pool indeed is clean. Prior to its activities I unofficially inaugurated the pool by picking up the extra chlorine tablets from the bottom; the water is cold but not as icy as the North Sea sometimes can be on a early beach day in June. When I put the tablets back we discover that filling the pool to the brim is not a good idea; for when I jump in a big wave sloshes over the pool on to the terrace. I feel like Obelix in the Roman bath house.

Thanks to F.'s good care a variety of cats drop by to get a snack. They look well, even the fur of the angora cat doesn't look mothly anymore. A little swarm of birds of prey appears one of these first days; my guess is that it's the Eleonora falcons on their way back from Africa. I once saw them in autumn when they were going in the opposite direction. And I experience my first earthquake while I sit quietly on the couch. Good I experienced one in Maastricht otherwise I would not have recognised it, so little was the vibration. F. was outside and did not notice.

It starts to rain as predicted and alas our roof still leaks. In spite of the coating Thanassis said he had applied on the roof last winter. With floorcloths and towels we manage readily, but it sure would be handy if it were fixed one day. We pick up G. and D. and H. and J. from the airport with two cars, in the rain, and so the hard core of our παρέα is complete. On the way back home we stop at the baker in Pyrgos for bread. He baked Easter cookies, from a traditional Lent recipe: no eggs, butter or milk, just flour, a bit of oil, a bit of sugar and cinnamon. They taste nice, like shortbread.

The sun returns as forecasted and I continue to weed the herbs alongside the terrace and concrete of the catwalk. After two days of work it is done. It is not the worst of jobs, sitting in the sun with the singing of the birds in the background. The short toed eagle reappears too, circling through the air looking for prey.

Easter starts with new showers of rain. We celebrate it with the παρέα, on Easter Sunday, at our house, inside. I take out all the best china and cutlery. D. and J. prepare the appetizers (Greek chicken soup with ιουβέτσοι, Greek tiny pasta, and bird's nests, meat balls with a whole egg inside. R. cooks leg of lamb in the oven, with broccoli, and I have baked to Limburg pies. But first we call Thanassis in Blankenberge to wish him a Καλό Πάσχα each by turn. He is perplexed by these wishes from us, we notice. When dinner has progressed to the desert, the pies, the nice weather has returned so we sit on the terrace until sunset.

Kanello, the dog from G. and D.'s neighbour Giorgos, has followed their car up to our house. As a reward for his patient waiting he gets the bone of the lamb's leg. He walks away with it, probably to bury it. As G. and D. return home, he follows their car back to his own place. But when we wake up the next day, he lies on our terrace waiting for more treats. Occasionally he chases away some cats and empties their bowl with cat food. He tests several spots on the terrace in the sun or in the shade, but when he gets no more food he disappears. To G. and D.'s, we learn later on, to see if he can get anything over there. Anti-tic drops, we hope, for there are many on his head and snout. The next days he shuttles back and forth between the houses of the παρέα.

I start weeding the herbs on the piece of land I want to turn into an endemic botanic garden, but I leave the nicest flowering plants in peace. At the back I put some plants of the maquis from the hills around us. We already observed that after three years the plants of the maquis start to return on the hillsides which were freshly made when our house was being built. Apart from a small vegetable garden and a small flowering garden we want the rest to return to their natural semi-wild state of maquis, so that's definitely a step in the right direction.

When I throw away some greens in the compost bin, I notice the beginning of a new wasp nest on the inside of the lid. Since it is still relatively small and only one wasp is present, I have enough courage to remove it with the end of a flat rock, and afterwards smash it with some more stones. We've had enough trouble when there was in the meter of the ρεύμα so that was enough! The first scorpion has also made its appearance, on the back of a stone which we had laid out to form some stepping stones in the mud of our driveway. Lucky for us it was cold from the rain so it was not very active. But we helped him to another, happier world. The swallows discover the insects

floating on the surface our swimming pool. They help us keeping it clean by picking them out of the water in their flight.

The end of the Easter holiday approaches for R. and D., so another reason for a dinner. This time at Stella's, the Cypriot restaurant in Balos, which has just opened for the season. And if we may believe the weather forecasts the rainy day afterwards is definitely the farewell of the winter.

The weather turns out as the forecasts predicted so every day it gets warmer. Soon the first shorts-and-top-day arrives. We have to apply sun screen balm. The water in the swimming pool rises one degree in temperature per day. When one day it reaches 24 degrees Centigrade I go for a real swim for the first time. Approved!

The rains during the Easter period have caused a new burst of greens around the house so we take put the lawn trimmer for a second time. We trim the area around the house, the pool and the catwalk and also the growing greens on the entrance road. It takes us the better part of a day to complete it. When I swipe away the greens on the terrace, I notice a piece of rope behind the garbage bin. Something Aris must have left when he was at work on the swimming pool, I think. When I take a closer look I see that it actually is a little snake. When I poke it carefully with the back of the broom stick it does not move. It's dead so we take a picture for our collection of wild animals. It's a juvenile non-poisonous leopard snake, our guide tells us. Sometimes kept as pet to kill mice and rats in and around the house, we learn. Not for us though, so we throw it down over the edge of our "lawn". For whom it may concern. A few days later, when I quietly sit reading on the terrace, a shrew suddenly runs through the vegetable garden, from hole to hole in the rock wall. Shrews eat insects (they are related to the hedgehog) so I don't have to worry that it will steal our strawberries.

The transport of our mattresses from Maastricht to Samos turns into a continuing story of As it turns out the minivan with our gear will arrive at Piraeus on the evening of Sunday 29th of April. This turns out to be a highly difficult day for us mainly because the ferry from Samos arrives either the Friday morning before or the Monday morning afterwards. It does not sail daily in April. And Monday evening the 30th we might not get back since the next day, 1st of May, is a national holiday.

Our luck seems to turn when neighbour R. advises us to employ Foustanella Transports in Karlovassi. The day after Easter they're closed but the next day we quickly come to terms with the friendly boss who will pick up the mattresses etc. from Piraeus. They will even bring them to our house afterwards. Reassured we leave after giving our cell phone number and that of the driver of the minivan. I also have them write down the licence plate number of the minivan.

Eventually things take their own Greek turn, as usual. When the driver of the minivan calls Foustanella to announce his arrival at the terminal of the ferry to Crete in Piraeus, he gets an astonished reply that the firm does not operate on Sundays. Subsequently he calls me, and only because one of our guest on the terrace hears the telephone I get to talk to him. My blood pressure rises sky-high when I hear the news but I promise him to call Foustanella myself. After a "yes-I-did-no-you-did-not" conversation for several minutes, I get them to try to call their contact in Piraeus solely because of my polite-but-persistent pressure. This succeeds but then they want to know which ferry to Crete to drive to because there are three of them. I try to call the driver of the minivan again but I only get the voicemail. Time passes by; he has to board the ferry so my blood pressure rises even further. Eventually I get him on the phone and he tells me the name of the ship. But I am so nervous that I immediately forget it so I have to call him again. Finally I can tell Foustanella where they can find the minivan. I prepare myself that the next few days I will have to arrange how the mattresses will have to be shipped from Crete to Samos. But half an hour before final boarding time I get a text message that all is reloaded in the van of Foustanella's contact in Piraeus. So what's the stressing about, huh? not 5 minutes before the deadline! Two days later the mattresses are delivered on our doorstep. We sleep like a log on them.

I buy anti-tic drops in the shop for agricultural products. Kanello drops by and I apply it in his neck. He thinks it smells, for he sneezes loudly and then tries to rub it off by rolling in the grass on his back. I try to please him with a toy ball with a bell in it, but as with the stray cats here, he obviously

did not have any toys when he was a puppy. He stares at it blankly, and jumps away when it hits his paws. Then he takes it into his mouth, but drops it again as he does not know what to do with it. He disappears into the bushes and does not show up anymore. Later we find out his boss has put him on the leash again. The tics indeed have fallen off, G. observed. He tells Kanello's boss that people actually like it when the dog drops by now and again, and after that he is freed from the leash. He now has been fitted with a little cowbell on his collar. When G. and F. take a walking tour in the surrounding area of our houses he accompanies them the whole stretch. He recognises the cars of the παρέα and their guests and accompanies them when they go and visit each other.

I bought some dog treats at the Lidl's so when he drops by he gets one, not more than one every day. His boss has to take care of the rest, I contemplate. I try to get him to accept the stick I have, but to him sticks are for beating because he backs off when I hold it out to him. Same goes for an old slipper which I throw on the grass. But he has a naughty mind because he takes some cheap inflatable toys we once got from the table at the swimming pool when we do not look. I retrieve them under the solar panels, torn. Same applies for a flat children's football we found some place and which I had put on the same spot on the swimming pool table. It also winds up under the solar panels.

In Karlovassi we stop at the little shed at the seaside where we once had a marble plate made for the little wall next to the refrigerator. Now I want a circular plate for a sun dial. After a while the man shows up and assures us he can make a round table plate for us. When I give him the measures, he notifies us that he'd rather have the underpart of the table itself. We promise to bring it next time. when we do so the young man (his grandson?) tells us it will take him four hours to complete. But we have to move on so we say we'll be back next day. When we do so next morning he hasn't even started yet but later that afternoon it is indeed ready.

I go to the pebble beach near our house to take pictures of the plants over there (sea blite which is edible, we should have served that with the leg of lamb at Easter!). I notice that the big flat pebbles from the edge of our vegetable garden and of the inlay with our names on the terrace of the swimming pool were collected here. Which subsequently inspires me to make the mosaic which I had planned on a corner next to the terrace the same way. The design I already know: the dolphins of the Roman mosaic floor at the sanctuary of Hera here on Samos. I collect some small pebbles but then I realise I will have to get several big pots to sort the pebbles on size and colour. A few days later I notice that part of the floor of the terrace of our favourite restaurant at Ormos is made into a mosaic in the same way.

The day approaches that our friends and neighbours B. and E. will come to Samos, so I ring Soula to make an appointment for the keys of the apartment at Bella Vista. She drops by with the key a few days later. I ask her to call Aris for some minor repairs and he appears shortly afterwards. I get him to write down his cell phone number so now we can call him ourselves. He fixes the little problems in no time and yes, even at 10 o'clock in the morning he would like a beer.

When B. and E. have arrived we make old and new trips. B. has brought his "TomTom"-gps, but it is not the blessing he had hoped for. It sends him right through NeoChori. We all know that's a dead-end street but B. does not know that of course so he literally gets stuck with the car. It takes a while before he has freed it. One day at Pythagorion we suddenly perceive a separate container for used paper at the waste deposit on the parking area. Πω πω!

B. is very handy with technical issues so he discovers that the black soot from our gas cooker is due to the fact that the nozzles on it are made for natural gas and not for the liquid mixture of cylinder gas we use. In the drawer under the oven we discover the right nozzles in a plastic bag with spare parts and after obtaining a proper socket spanner in the right size B. changes the nozzles for us. So after a good scrubbing of the pans (in the old fashioned way, outside, with sand) hopefully no more black bottomed pans for us! B. also retrieves one of my earrings which I had dropped down the drain of the bathroom wash basin.

With B. and E. we go and have a drink in Koumeika on the little village square at old Maraki's taverna. She always looks a bit sorrowful but when she notices F. her expression clears. When B. takes pictures of the scene she puts her arm halfway around F.'s shoulder, her face beaming all over. The story goes that as a young teenage girl she had an eye for the Italians who occupied Samos

during the Second World War. With some imagination you could say that F. looks a bit Italian. B. promises to send her the pictures.

When son S. of our friends F. and B. also shows up on Samos with his girlfriend unexpectedly, we all get together on a sunny Sunday to exchange stories. S. gives me a copy of the latest version of Greece from his gps, which is a different brand from B.'s, but the same as we have.

G. and D. and H. and J. return to Belgium. When B. and E. have returned to the Netherlands too (after a farewell dinner at Mimis' in Balos with the delicious lamb chops for me), things quiet down a bit. We do some odd house jobs, water the plants of our neighbours and feed the cat that has adopted herself to H. and J. She is pregnant, and when she has thinned out we look forward to see the kittens. But so far no sight of them.

May 2012

The weather stays nice, with sometimes a really hot day and sometimes a somewhat cooler day. A few days with clouds and a little bit of rain gives the surroundings a fresh green look. The temperature in the swimming pool now qualifies as "luke warm". Some days we scoop out so many flies and mosquitos that it would be a nice protein addition to the diet of an average African household. A pair of early tiny scorpions takes a onetime dive in to the pool which turns out to be a one way ticket into the robot cleaner. Also, a beautiful large swallowtail butterfly ends up floating dead-quiet around, posing for a picture.

The orchid at the sleeping room window does not flower anymore; but we discover another in full bloom under an olive tree a few meters further on our yard. Nearing mid-May a lot of flowers are already dried out due to the above-average warm weather, but I still discover some new, unknown varieties. Along the road to the rocky beach I find a late orchid which is, to me, a hybrid between the *Orchis sancta* (holy orchid) and the fragrant orchis (*A. fragrans*). And everywhere you see the pale blue flowers of the chicory and the pink ones of the low Aegean thistle. When I take pictures of the flowers along the roadside I get into a conversation with the lady from the pink summer cottage across our valley. It was completely renewed last year when the previous inhabitants, her parents, had died. Roula, she introduces herself. "Ελισαβέτα" I reply as she does not understand my Dutch short name. A distinguished old man in an expensive dark blue car always greets us very enthusiastically as he passes by; we don't know who he is. Probably someone we were introduced to in the taverna in Skouraiika, we guess.

We do get known in the area, we assume, since in Karlovassi we are heartedly greeted by a woman with a dark brown curling ponytail. Her face has something familiar but we cannot remember where we met her. A sister of Thanassis? Also the waitress in the lunchroom on the new plateia greets us as she recognizes us from former visits. When we explain where we live she tells us that she lives nearby in NeoChori.

Since I don't want to leave things until it's too late, I have passport photos taken tenfold in order to apply for a residence certificate at the police in Marathokampos. F. already did that the first year the house was ready, since it was compulsory in order to buy a car here (with Greek license plates). The officer on duty first does not understand why I want one of my own (since my husband already has one) but eventually accepts my papers for the application. But I have to get a Greek translation of my health insurance card so that brings us once more to our lawyer Giorgos Papakonstantinou. After exchanging the news he types the translation on the computer and applies a nice stamp and his signature on the document. So the next day we deliver all the paperwork to the police station again. But then it becomes clear that I need a European health card, which, we find out, can be applied for at our Dutch insurance company. Which will send it to our home address in the NL, so this story will be continued in September. And also, by recommendation of Papakonstantinou, we pay a visit the office of mr. Kypraios in Marathokampos who handles our tax affairs, and of which we have not heard for a long time. The assistant who speaks English still remembers us, but first she has to study our file again before she can help us any further.

On the Belgian/Dutch chat forum Oriste about Greece I recommended Bella Vista II in Blankenberge. One of the forum members goes to visit it and writes a very positive review about it. We do hope that it will now attract more customers!

Nothing very much else happens. Aris drops by with new chlorine tablets for the pool. When a truck with a lot of wooden poles stops at the road above our house, we get the idea that it might be the material for our wooden cabin. Which proves to be wishful thinking for it moves on. We pick up H. in her wheelchair from Balos to show her around in our house and later on for a dinner at the Cypriot restaurant. D. and her sister C. fly over for a week. I bake a Limburgian sweet rice pie to serve with the coffee for all the visitors. The water supply stops for several hours two days in a row. We don't know if this is due to maintenance since we cannot ask Thanassis and Takis. When it is over we notice that the tap from the sink in the kitchen is completely clogged with chalk; half a litre of cleaning vinegar solves the problem. We suddenly realise that there have been no electricity cuts for the whole of last month (April). But the thought immediately gets its revenge for a few days later we have a power cut from 9 to 3 and the next day for another 5 minutes. But by keeping the door of the freezer closed and the one of the fridge only opened once or twice nothing serious happens actually. The same applies for the houses of the neighbours who are absent and which we check several times a week. We assume it to be maintenance work since exactly at 3 o'clock the power is back. Just like in March.

The most exciting event so far is the appearance of a small caterpillar tractor which starts performing undefined tasks in the valley under the house (Later on it looks like it has broadened the road a little bit). It is very noisy. So is the car one day when I take hairpin curves; the wheels also block. A hasty visit to the garage learns on that I have accidentally switched on the knob for extra power 4 wheel drive for when stuck in mud, while I was adjusting the ventilation shafts. A bit stupid and it teaches me a lesson in humility.

Persuaded by the weather forecasts which keep on predicting rain for a whole week the weather finally gives in and we have some real showers of rain for a night and half a day. We do not mind: it is good for the land and by the somewhat lower temperatures we are able to give the house a thorough cleaning without losing too much sweat. For the last part of May (weather forecast: sun) life will get busier: a lot of neighbours will arrive and our friend S. will come to stay with us for two weeks. So she will be able to test our newly bought sunbathing beds at the edge of the swimming pool.

We gather some papers for the tax office and together with our lawyer mr. Papakonstantinou we visit some bureaus in order to collect some more papers. But every place we visit only increases the confusion about our situation, so at last we decide that Papakonstantinou first will do some checks before we continue. When he will call again, remains to be seen

When the neighbours and the friends have arrived, we make some trips in the area. The weather keeps changing: from time to time cloudy and/or some raindrops, but sunny most of the time. We already visited Pythagoras' cave, halfway up the mountains behind Votsalakia. It seems the mathematician spent some time there after he got into a conflict with tyrant Polycrates somewhere around 500 BC. Typical that people always find it necessary to build a (catholic!) little chapel on a spot like that

Now, together with our Swiss neighbours and their guests, we visit the Potami waterfalls near Karlovassi. It is a pleasant walk in a lush green gorge with a small river flowing through. Eventually we do not really reach the waterfalls since you'd have to wade and swim through the river after the footpath ends (and later, on a postcard, I see that in fact it is a teeny weeny little waterfall). Instead we climb up the 120 steps of the wooden stairs to the restaurant at the top of the gorge where we take a short break with refreshments. The owner put some nice pictures on the walls of her grandparents and a certificate her grandfather got for his brave behaviour during the Second World War.

We book the ferry to Kusadasi on the Turkish coast. It now leaves from Pythagorion, not from Vathi. Last time we did that, we visited Milete and Pryene, because it was during the school holidays and many busloads of tourists were heading for the famous Ephesos. Now it is not a school holiday so this is our chance to visit a somewhat quieter Ephesos, we gather. We also want to visit the nearby museum so the plan is to take a taxi from the harbour, just like last time, in order to be able to spend maximum time at the site and the museum.

But from the start things go wrong. First, my foot gets hurt by a big stone from the lid of the compost heap which protects it from unwanted invaders. The stone slips from my hand and misses my foot but in the rebound bruises it quite painfully. That diminishes after a while, but a few hours later, when we are at neighbour's H. and J. to help them with the language as they discuss some odd jobs with a local worker, my foot starts to hurt terribly. Back home I bandage it tightly but it only gets worse, so I take some strong painkillers from F. When we turn in early to watch football on the little tv in the bedroom, there is a massive power cut due to a big thunderstorm, so we decide to go to sleep instead.

The painkillers work so next morning we (me with bandaged foot and walking stick) find ourselves on the quay at Pythagorion at a quarter to 8. At 10 we still stand waiting, so we decide it is time for a cappuccino at Manolis'. Alas, no boat to Turkey today. A young Japanese woman who's also waiting at the quay wants to go to Patmos, we find out after we turn her words into something eligible. I show her the timetable which says that that ferry will sail at 2:30 this afternoon.

We turn an old joke into something new: "Do you know that joke about a Dutchy and a Limburger and an East-Fleming who went to Ephesos? Well, they didn't!" In Vathi we get a refund from the booking office without any trouble. After we do some shopping and visit the wine museum, we return to Pythagorion for lunch. There, we see the young Japanese woman leave the quay at 2 o'clock, with a big backpack and some more, heading for the bus station. Exactly at 2:30 the ferry to Patmos moors at the quay, but the young lady is nowhere to be seen anymore.

To finish the day we take the scenic route via Spatharei back home. As it is a sunny day we decide to drive up the field road at Bournias to the communication masts at the top of the mountain. There, at 800 metres, you can oversee the whole island. So far up the mountain the season is slower than down in the lower, warmer valleys so our friend S. still can have her pick of taking pictures of flowering orchids.

We already explored the western point of the island around Paleochori in the direction of Drakei, so now we take the field road down where we make a stop at the small sleepy wharf of Agios Isodoros. As always we end at the roof terrace of Taverna Kostas in Drakei, where you have a nice view over the sea at the northwest side of the island. We contemplate all the corners of the island we already explored; except the northeastern side. On the way back we have a drink at Maraki's taverna in Koumeika. She received the pictures B. sent her; delighted with it so to see. Though she thinks she looks quite old, we understand. The drinks are on the house, to thank us.

To show off to the people back home, we decide to take some decadent pictures of ourselves in the swimming pool drinking some fancy cocktails and picking at a plate with succulent olives, with the sea and the mountains at the background. Just as friend S. and me (wearing make-up and earrings) pose for F. with the camera, an old pick-up van crosses along the road above our house. The Greek driver is so flabbergasted that he stops to watch the scene. He sure will have something to tell back home about those crazy χένοες!

The guests start to leave so after a few goodbye-diners we wave goodbye to son-in-law J. of our neighbours H. and J. as he takes the ferry from Karlovassi and, later on, somewhat sleepy, to our friend S. on the very early morning flight to Athens.

At night you now can hear the crickets; the scorpions little by little seem to find their way to our premises. Which ends up badly for the latter ones. During the day, the temperature rises above 25 degrees Centigrade (in the shade). Summer is approaching!

June 2012

The tax matters don't really seem to make any progress so we decide to make a proposition for a preliminary payment ourselves to avoid a fine. Our lawyer finally is familiar with email so we send him a draft of our proposition. Good for that, since I cannot fax him; after I stopped working I do not have access to a fax anymore. Anyway he agrees on talking to the tax department about the proposition.

The wasps are persistent and keep coming back to build a new nest in or next to the meter of the ρεύμα after we remove the previous one. Aris helps us by throwing petrol over it, but once it has

evaporated they simply return and start all over again. Eventually I buy a bottle of some pyrethrum derivate insecticide and spray the walls and the underside of the roof at the back of the house. It seems to work.

After some earlier efforts I finally find the proper way for the yearly cleaning of the dark blue Venetian blinds with its innumerable oblique strips (for 3 French and 5 “normal” windows). First you brush them thoroughly with a thin brush and then you spray them with a mixture of water, soap and vinegar to rinse away the rests of the dust and the chalk remains of the water. They shine and shimmer in the sun! Also, I clean the outside lamps, which haven’t been done since the house was built.

One morning the telephone rings at 5 to 8: it is neighbour C. When I answer it somewhat puzzled, he informs me that there are dolphins to be seen in the bay. We run outside, and indeed, through binoculars, out on the smooth sea we see how the dolphins appear with their well-known dorsal fins, amidst a lot of seagulls. Probably they are hunting for fish. We truly enjoy this unexpected view. Last year I thought I saw a similar group like that but the sea was not as smooth so you did not know whether you were watching a dolphin’s back (or dorsal fin) or a wave.

Neighbours C. and R. keep having trouble with their electricity so they do their laundry at our house. As a thank you we get a kilo of medlars which I turn into marmelade. It tastes a bit like apple compote. R. herself has made us some quince jelly (very sweet) and raspberry marmelade (very delicious). I do some experimenting with ice making: the chocolate sherbet with Spanish pepper is an unexpected delightful surprise, the mastic ice turns out to be too strong of taste. The coconut cream ice however also is a success.

Our vegetable garden grows and grows in the meantime. The eggplants start flowering, and neighbour R. teaches me that the flowers which drop off are the male flowers. At the bottom of the female flowers little fruits already are visible. The same story applies for the watermelons and the sweet melons. Only there I perceive a lot of male flowers and only one or two females with the beginning of a fruit at the back ... Aris supplies us with a few kilos of potatoes from Thanassis’ and Roula’s vegetable garden. Our own rucola and coriander plants really grow fast. The marouli salad Thanassis had planted for us now starts shooting and flowering after I harvested three times from each head, so they’re done. We do however still have an enormous amount of onions left, so whoever passes by gets a bag full of them.

Talking about passing by..... One day when I get out of the pool after a refreshing swim, I suddenly see Thanassis’ ochre yellow Renault Kangoo driving past. I call out and he drives down to say hello. He tells us that he only is back home for a short while, for business. Tomorrow he will return to Belgium. When I ask him how things are over there he glumly replies “Προσπαθούμε”, (We try) instead of the usual “Καλά!” (Great!). Hmmm

One sunny morning we gather at Pyrgos where retired air hostess E. accompanies us on a jeep safari. We start at Spatharei where we drive down the unpaved track to Skouraiika and after that we take the track to Marathokampos via Pythagoras’ cave. Then on to Potami near Kokkari via the old platan at Nikoloudes and a wood with a little pool and fresh water crabs, surrounded by huge dark purple arums. After lunch we tend the trip by taking the track from Manolates to Ampelos via Stavrinidi. A nice day at which we were able to test the 4WD capacity of our jeep. A pity though that the high track across the Kerkis mountain was not safe yet; due to the relatively late rains there is a fair chance that parts of the road still may have been washed away. Someone on an off-road motor bike should test it, we contemplate. A motor bike can turn back when there is no road anymore!

In the meantime summer has arrived at full force. Nearing mid-June the temperature rises to above 35 degrees Centigrade in the shadow midday. Some days a fierce wind blows from the mountain so it is a bit more agreeable. We switch to the Mediterranean lifestyle: odd jobs in the morning, closing the shutters at noon and siesta after lunch. The fans at the ceiling in the living room and the bedroom turn at full speed. At the end of the afternoon we usually take a dip in the pool.

One day while drying myself with a towel after the swimming, I take a closer look at the eggplants and move on to the melons. Suddenly, between the strawberries, I see a strange type of beige hose lying next to the black tubing of the watering hose. I jump backward when I realise it is a snake.

After we observe it for a while, we see no movement. We recognise it as the large whip snake, which we already encountered last year at the terrace one day. Our field guide has learned us that it is not poisonous to humans and even very shy. So we do not understand why it has not moved away while we were walking around the swimming pool alongside the vegetable garden. When we approach it carefully we see that it has entangled itself in the net over the strawberries and has either suffocated itself or is dried out in the heat. Just to be sure we hit it on the head with a big stone before we take some pictures and throw it down over the side of our yard into the valley (wearing garden gloves). Actually it is a pity that it is not around anymore, being shy for humans but helping us by keeping away the mice and the rats by hunting for them. Some people even tame them as pets but that's one road too far for us.

A few days later neighbour D. calls. The net she and G. fixed around the grapes the previous day, to everybody's surprise, has led to an identical snake victim as well. Stupid animals!

Neighbours H. and J. return to Belgium for a few weeks. On their suggestion we dine on a delicious lobster with spaghetti from Fourni, to celebrate their leave and the victory of the Greeks at the European Championship football and of their return to common sense at the general elections.

Effi, the wife of Manolis from the Kalokairi Bar, tells us one day that a spring with late rains usually leads to a hot summer. That seems to come true as the weather forecasts predicts temperatures rising in the direction of 40 degrees Centigrade. On those days, our siesta lasts until the sun disappears behind Kerkis mountain, when the temperature becomes pleasant. In the meantime we watch some tv. "My dreamhouse in the sun" is my favourite program. Our house here always winds up as more beautiful/perfect than the ones shown on tv, to my malicious delight.

In the bedroom we swapped the old small tv-set on a small table for a bigger flatscreen on the wall, which gives us more space in the room and a more comfortable view. Giannis from Koumeika, who has also done some jobs for our neighbours H. and J., installs it for us. He does not like our flatscreen Sony in the living room, Samsung is far better according to him. Our fridge, which we bought with a discount three years ago, also is a Samsung, but that does not keep its pump from breaking down on day. So good for Samsung! We assume the pump cannot handle the high room temperature over here. So we spend some more money and buy a big Miele fridge-freezer. That one will hopefully last till the end of our days.

Every day we take a swim at the end of the afternoon. The water in the pool now is 37 degrees Centigrade, which implies that we have to add a new chlorine tablet into the filter every other day. At the beginning of April, when the water was 21 degrees, it was just once a week. Mornings and evenings we scoop the dead insects out of the water. One morning I suddenly see a small shrew swimming rounds in the pool. I take it out before it drowns of exhaustion. When it has come to its senses, I see it sneaking back to its hiding in the wall of the vegetable garden behind the back of sleeping cat Δροπή.

One Saturday night we and neighbours G. and D. go for souvlakis at the little taverna in Skouraiika. The weather is lovely so all the tables are put outside on the road. G. and D. already go there for a very long period so we are updated with the latest news on everyone.

At the end of June there is a sailing regatta at Ormos with festivities at night. Due to the strong wind there is no sailing however, but in the evening there is dancing and music at the harbour.

Aris paints the bottom of the swimming pool of neighbours R. and D. and starts filling it 10 days before their arrival, just as promised. The water pressure however is very low so the filling goes really slowly and the scorpions which have fallen into the pool dry out in the hot sun, we see as we drop by every other day to water the plants. When they arrive, the pool is only filled for one third.

F.'s 65th birthday approaches. We invite our friends on Samos by email and we bring invitations to our Greek neighbours, written in Greek and English. During the week they are not around in their "country houses" so I put the envelop with the invitation under a big stone at their entrances. Their reactions next weekend show that they appreciate the gesture. But whether they will actually come We do get known however, and one of the neighbours is the mayor of Skouraiika. When we have no water one day, afterwards he drops by in person to tell us that it is fixed. And he gives us his cell phone number in case there might be other mishap in the future. Me in the meanwhile, I

keep myself busy with the preparations for the “Pool Party”, such as food that can be cooked and frozen.

July 2012

The days prior to F.’s birthday there is a very strong wind in the afternoon and evening. We doubt whether a party at the edge of the pool is such a good idea. But, luckily, on the day itself there is only a mild breeze which keeps the temperature really agreeable. Our visitors, amongst others the grandchildren of our Flemish neighbours, jump into the pool enthusiastically, splashing around with delight. Aris brings his wife and children, our lawyer is accompanied by his wife and two teenager daughters. All our Greek neighbours show up too: mayor Kostas, neighbour Stavroula, the grumpy man with the little jeep, and Giannis and Rodopi from the house at the end of the road. Stamatis had dropped by earlier to excuse himself due to a back injury and from neighbour G. we learn that neighbour Giorgos is on duty at the fire brigade tonight.

And all bring along food and drink: cookies, cake, sausage rolls, tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, onions, olive oil, red wine, white wine, whisky My food is consumed whole heartedly and here too my Dutch stuffed eggs are eaten till the last crumb. Aris’ three year old son Reno is a naughty boy on which you have to keep an eye at all time. He barely escapes from falling into the pool, in contrast to Vieze the dirty cat which actually falls in at the end of the evening. Because it has only one eye left we assume it cannot measure distances properly.

The next few days we keep ourselves busy with cleaning and resting. From the pool we scoop out a lizard and next a bat. The latter one is still alive, barely, and I gently put it under some leaves from the melon in the vegetable garden. But he does not survive. We eat the leftovers, but also due to the food brought in by the neighbours, we cannot finish it. We give some to our Flemish neighbours but throw away what’s left after that. Our departure to the Netherlands approaches.

To say goodbye we go out and dine at Balos with our παρέα. On the way home we see a light brown animal running across the road. It’s a jackal. They’re back!

August 2012

After six weeks in the Netherlands we return to Samos. We’re happy to leave the Netherlands behind. The weather gave us just enough sunny days to finish the necessary odd jobs around the house, and besides that a lot of rain. Especially the first weeks after we had just returned. We started an account on Facebook to pass time. And our visit to Blankenberge, at the end of July, also was made under an overcast sky. Thanassis and his family were glad to see us, we felt pity for them since it had been one of the worst summers so far. I tried to cheer them up by remarking that August usually gave better weather, which turned out pretty true.

Furthermore we got totally berserk by the mistakes which have been made with F.’s new OV-chipkaart (smartcard for public transportation). Even mine started acting strange. It took us many telephone calls and even a registered letter to try and solve the problems. The bureaucracy of the involved (privatised) companies equals Greece!

Neighbours R. and D. kept an eye on our house. We received messages of ripe melons, advanced paid bills and mostly about get-togethers and parties on the island. Some young rascals took a swim in our swimming pool during our absence but Aris has found out who they are and promised to go and see them to give them a piece of his mind.

So, after a last few meetings with family and friends, at 4 o’clock in the morning we get into the minivan that will drive us to the airport at Düsseldorf, in a cheerful mood.

We have an uneventful flight, even in Rhodes we are allowed to stay in the airco’d plane. We get into our car, run some errands and report to the neighbours to drop of the present for the birthday of their also present brother-in-law. After we are informed on the latest news we drive home, unpack and have a good night’s sleep.

The next days we keep ourselves busy with removing the fine sand from the storms, which has mainly gotten into the swimming pool. It takes the robot some 4 cleaning cycles to get rid of it for some 95%. It has gotten into the blue paint of the pool, so we scrub the rims and the steps of the stairs with some special cleaning product. But even then the pool will need a new layer of paint next

winter because it does not get off completely. However after that we regularly cool down in our pool again.

During the day the temperatures go near 40 degrees Centigrade in the shade with little wind. Then we stay indoors with the shutters closed; it only cools down at sunset, quarter to eight. Only after that we have dinner, at home or at a restaurant to celebrate whatever comes up. One of the first nights of our stay it is Panagia, All Saints, of the patron of our village. After the singing of the pope and the village elder men this time there is a communal meal with skewers and loukoumades, sweet dough fritters. And ouzo and wine and fruit juice. The Bulgarian woman, who married Thanassis' nephew at Easter last year, and who danced on the table into the wee hours of the night, is also present. She walks around with her three month old son, just like any other young woman, in denim shorts. At midnight it is finished, but the temperature has gone down to such an agreeable degree that we stay another two hours on neighbours H. and J's balcony to chat some more with our παρέα. So next morning we are not really in the mood, at 8.30, after some more singing, to collect our bowl of special Panagia porridge at the little church.

After our first week the sun sets as a nice red balloon, not anymore like the scorching white ball as before. In the night the temperature drops so we sleep like a log. And the next morning I even notice some small clouds! During the day the temperature rises to a nice 32 degrees C. As another warm storm hits the island we have to collect the cushions from the garden chairs at the road below.

Every morning we take our time drinking coffee in the shade at the edge of the pool. Nothing much happens, except for one morning. A little sailing ship capsizes at a sudden strong wind and the crew - in the water - take great pains to put the boat back into order. A little motorised fishing boat from the beach below us helps out.

The melons in the vegetable garden give us trouble as to determine their ripeness. The outside should start cracking, I read somewhere. But that proves to be partially true: the first one with cracks is very sweet but the second one is not. I decide to take them all and preserve them as pickles. I buy some fresh ginger root (which is called pepper root in Greek) and for some two hours I cut the melons into cubes. A lot of jars are filled with the pickle so the whole παρέα is supplied with "Sweet & Sour Melon" to give it a try.

The grumpy old neighbour now greets us from time to time as he passes by. One day he stops and hands us a bag with fresh figs. Also for R. and D., we understand as it seems they met him a few days earlier at Karlovassi. There they started small talk as they remembered each other from our pool party. At D.'s birthday pool party Mid-July some Greek acquaintances also showed up and took their share of swimming pool fun. I started a new trend over here, I immodestly think. I also get the idea to make the watermelons (which give the same problem as how to determine the ripeness) into "Sweet & Sour Watermelon" and supply the Greek neighbours with a jar of it, to do something in return.

We visit Maraki at her tavern. I bought her a photo frame for her birthday and namesday, for the photo of F. and B. and herself. Another trip leads us to Ireon, where the quire in which Monica, the retired opera singer from the "Double Monarchy" (the group of Austrians and Hungarians which used to come to Bella Vista on Sundays to dance on the music) sings, performs in the open air theatre. When we arrive it becomes clear that it is not in the theatre but at the site of the old sanctuary of Hera. It is the night of the Γαλάζιο Φεγγάρι, the Blue Moon (the second full moon within one month) and to celebrate this throughout the whole of Greece concerts are given at archeological sites, based on the theme "Moon". I'd loved it to be really inside the temple of Hera, but it is located next to it. Still a beautiful setting. A nice ending to the August month.

September 2012

The first sign that autumn is approaching is that the night temperatures drop. Not much, but just enough to wake up in a nice cool bedroom in the morning. During the day the temperature still rises up to 35 degrees in the sunshine, but the water in the pool cools down a bit by the cool nights and the strong wind that blows during a week. It is not lukewarm anymore. Neighbour R. gets information from big Takis (back from Blankenberge with wife and kids because the schools start

up again) that now here in Greece technology and means are available to warm the swimming pool water with solar panels. We let them now that we are also interested - thus we will be able to extend the swimming season some more.

In the morning there are not many insects anymore to fish out of the swimming pool, I suspect this is due to the relatively hot summer. The few grasshoppers however are enormous - 8 to 10 cm while my field guide gives 3 - 5 cm as an average. The scorpions prefer sticking to the walls of the pool - drowned and all. They are relatively small, other years we've seen bigger ones. One night when we get home I see a relatively large one sitting outside on the wall. When I hit it I miss it halfway; it runs away into the grass. Next morning we see an ant carrying away a scorpion's tail (poison sting included) four times bigger than itself.

Neighbour D. wants to know the exact borders of the piece of land he bought behind our plot. He invites architect Evangelis Makris to come and measure it and one day the man arrives with high tech surveyor equipment. When he is done it appears that our plot is far bigger than we suspected. But then, you have to maintain it in good order too (keeping the grass short for risk of bush fires). An advantage is that the last part of Thanassis' (illegal?) access road to his (illegal?) deposit across our (extended) plot is suitable for a sort of jeu-de-boules field. Aris drops by to repair a tap and to bring us a bag full of ripe figs. He frowns at the poles and the cord neighbour D. has put around his plot and we explain to him what happened. We are sure Blankenberge will be informed in no time. Most of the figs I preserve in a mixture of sweet Samos wine and Metaxa, the Greek cognac, also to give away to our Greek neighbours.

One evening we drive to a little mountain village further along the road to Karlovassi where a local form of jeu-de-boules is played, *μπάλα* (balla). It is played on the paved streets of the village centre with a big cubic block of cypress wood as centre block. Every man has to try to bowl it away with his own piece of kidney shaped cypress wood. There is a little taverna where we have dinner while we watch the competition. At the end the street dirt is washed away at a fountain where a local artist has made a wonderful sculpture of Artemis and some beautifully cast zoomorphic bronze taps with a delphin, a dog and a horse.

One Sunday afternoon the whole of the *παρέα* and the people from the "Double Monarchy" make a trip to Kerveli at the east point of the island. There at a taverna Greek music is played during the Sunday lunch. We think back of those Sunday afternoons at Bella Vista and Makis' music with lots of nostalgia.

During a lunch at neighbours R. and D. we renew our acquaintance with E., the retired Sabena airline hostess and her husband the painter R. E. is interested in Samos plants just like me so we have a lot to talk about. We arrange for another jeep safari next week along the high roads along the Kerkis mountain (1450 m) and the Karvouni mountain (1150 m). E. heard from a reliable (!) source that the tracks are in good condition. So next Wednesday we gather for a mountain tour. The high road along the Kerkis leads us along a part of the island where a big bushfire took place two years ago; a sad view. At the highest point along the route (still far away from the mountain top alas) there is a monument made by the KKE (Greek communist party) standing brotherly alongside a little chest full of icons. In between we take short walking tours in the mountain villages. A old lorry filled with half burnt tree trunks wriggles its way alongside our jeeps. It is the only oncoming traffic, apart from a donkey with and one without a driver, a mule and a pick-up van filled with goats. We find the first little cyclamens of the season: another herald of autumn coming. Along the Karvounis route we see a man of the (voluntary) fire brigade taking watch in a high stool overlooking the hillsides of the mountain. We heard this takes place at several spots on the island. We conclude we are actually too late in the season to see the mountains at their best: almost all the plants have dried out under the scorching sun. We decide to do this tour again next year at the beginning of May when all the plants are in flower.

A bill from the electricity company arrives and we decipher we have to pay it before the end of the month. So the next time we are in Karlovassi we visit our bank to pay it from our Greek bank account. A form with a lot of data has to be filled out and at the end it turns out that we authorized the bank to pay the electricity bills automatically from our bank account. Just what we already had tried (in vain) to achieve some time ago. But when we had asked (at the Vodafone telephone store)

how we could do that we only got a lot of eyebrow raising. And now we know how to do it. But, for this time we still had to pay the current (electricity) bill in cash for the system had not yet digested the authorisation. Where then could we pay it? That raised some more eyebrows, the lady can hardly hold back “Δεν ξέρω” (How would I know?) and consults a co-worker. The post office maybe? Then I suddenly remember that the lady from the Vodafone shop has once offered to pay it at her office so we cross the street to check that out (the post office is four blocks away). And indeed, you do not pay your electricity bill cash at your bank but at a commercial telephone shop.

Mid-September arrives with a few beautiful days without any wind, only a few tiny clouds. I swim in the pool every day and wonder how long the water will stay nice. When we are at our Swiss neighbours C. and R. to make arrangements for the farewell dinner for most of our neighbours, we suddenly see the short toed eagle make its reappearance. It is back from the cool mountains, together with some other birds. Another sing autumn is nearing.

The hunters loudly notify us that it is mid September. The Sunday before they already explore the surroundings at six o'clock in the morning with their barking dogs. Sometimes you perceive one wearing a brightly coloured vest and a big rifle slung around his shoulder, roaming through the bushes - coughing from time to time so he might not be shot by one of his colleagues. The partridges can hear them coming from miles away It is said that there are not many hares this year, due to the jackals which have returned to the area. The hunters do not enter the private grounds since mayor Kostas has placed signs that hunting in inhabited areas is prohibited. One day I see Stavroula walking up the road to Skouraiika so I can give her a jar with the preserved figs I made. I also give her one for Rodopi since I have not seen her for a while. Aris already got a jar.

A few days later a cold wind suddenly comes up so we have to wear long pants in the morning, for the first time. And at night too, since we have several good-bye dinners. All of the Flemish neighbours are leaving for Belgium one by one. We are smothered in food remainders; in that way we break even with the money spent on gas driving the neighbours to the airport. As we are in Pythagorion, we make another attempt to get tickets for Kusadasi to visit Ephesos on Wednesday the next week. That works out smoothly but a few days later we find out that a general strike is starting that specific Wednesday - including customs. So when we get the last neighbours to the airport we change our tickets for the Tuesday before the strike.

The wind disappears a few days later so the pool warms up another half centigrade per day and gets swimmable again. Though it hasn't rained for almost four months now - extreme, even over here. The olive trees droop, a nice shower is what the olives need just before they are harvested. I cannot remember the autumn rains being that late.

E. drops by and I prepare her a nice lunch which we eat at the back terrace near the bedroom in the shade. The garden table just fits in. We chat up about the animals and plants on Samos. She lets us know that near her village the Colchicum - autumn crocus - is in flower. Since it does so only for a short time we decide to drive up to her the next day. We have a drink with her and her husband R. We admire his paintings in the studio under the house. The young Belgian couple which bought a holiday house at the complex in Balos also drop by. We drive up to the convent outside the village and admire the flowering Colchicum and some other plants. After that we continue to M. where E. owns a little house. We eat a late lunch on the village square and return home after a well spent day.

The last Tuesday of September we leave home early to be at the quai in Vathi at eight o'clock. We have an uneventful crossing and at 11 o'clock we stand at the gate of the archeological site in Ephesos. However I did not foresee the crowds of people. Later we get to hear that some huge cruise ships have moored at Smyrna, and lots of Bulgarians and Russians have chosen to come over here. We wriggle ourselves through the masses. The excavations are impressive though, especially Celsus' library. To our dismay the last part of the site is closed for the public so we do not get to see the brothel and the stadium. We eat our homemade lunch in the shade near the exit, and then find our way outside to our taxi driver Kemal. We drive to the museum of Ephesos which is small but contains several fine artifacts, amongst which some large, beautifully carved sculptures of Artemis. I assume the oval objects on her chest are eggs, to symbolise fertility, and not bull's balls (as some other theory suggests). We have a quick look at the one remaining column of the Artemision and

then return to Kusadasi where we rest our legs. The sailing back to Samos is smooth and at half past seven we sit down at the side of our pool - it is still very warm without any wind.

We watch the stars and contemplate on the spent day as well as on the fact that we now are "on our own" since all of our neighbours have returned to Belgium and Switzerland. Then suddenly a minivan drives down our entranceway. I get up, a little angry, because of this disturbance of our privacy. Young rascals again, or people who think it is a public road? The minivan parks just behind our car and suddenly we see Giannis and Rodopi getting out - their hands full with food: cake, bread and fresh little fishes. Probably to thank us for the preserved figs. We offer them a drink and sit down to chat. It appears that the next morning there will be a celebration at the little church next to the beach houses in the valley under our house. We did not even know there was a church over there ... We do not understand whether the celebration is for the nameday of Afrodite, Stamatis' wife, or for some other reason. It starts at 7 o'clock, we are told, and lasts till 9.

So the next morning we rise early again and at 5 to 7 we are at the little church which is indeed next to the beach houses. At 7 o'clock Giannis appears just to open the church and light the candles. At a quarter past 7 the priest arrives (the same one as at the Panagia at Pevkos a month ago) together with two assistants. They disappear into the church and not much later the priest and his male assistant start singing, unintermittently, until 9. Gradually the villagers appear, some as late as half past 8. We recognise some people from Skouraiika above. We join the group when they go inside to light a candle. I however do not kiss the icon - that is over the top for me and besides that it's unhygienic. I just nod politely at it. When the mass is done, breakfast is served under the olive trees: bread and loukoumades and cookies. And ouzo, coffee, water and soft drinks. I present the last jar of my fig preserve (which I had brought in case Afrodite might get presents but so far there is no sign of that). Mayor Kostas informs us that every year at the 26th of September this celebration of Panagia - All Saints (?) is held. (Note: Later we find out that it is John's namesday - Αγιάννης). Which makes us realise we have never been over here on the 26th of September before.

Now the neighbours have left every other day we make a round to water their plants - no rain foreseen in the whether forecasts yet - and feed the little cats at H. and J.'s. Their daughter K. hung a plastic bag with dry catfood on the doorknob of the shed and see, what I predicted has happened. The animals have jumped up to the plastic bag with their nails outstretched and have torn it. I collect the food from the ground and put it in a cleaned-out plastic paint bucket with a solid lid. The leftovers from Rodopi's fishes we feed to a cat that visits us every night and who strongly resembles good old but fattened Skinny - the pattern on his fur resembles the pictures we took some years ago and he is not shy. Only his head is much thicker...

September draws to a final with 30 degrees centigrade in the shade midday. Some thin high clouds appear in the sky - but still no rain.

October 2012

One morning the robot is put in the swimming pool to remove the sand. The water temperature still is okay - especially when there has been no wind for several days and the sun has been able to warm it. Because the robot cannot climb the steps I take out a broom and wipe them clean of the sand. At the fourth step I suddenly see a piece of rope coming out of the broom. And again it is no piece of rope but another little leopard snake. Flabbergasted it emerges and after some writhing around it clamps to the wall of the pool. Slightly frightened I call F. and together we decide to scoop it up with the net and allow it to slide away at the end of the terrace into the valley. The animal disappears at a facepalm moment: I should have taken a picture and/or video'd the event of course! Thanassis and family return and it is a cheerful reunion. They missed the sun, they tell us. I baked them another apple pie and give them some melons from our vegetable garden. They however did not return alone: in the apartment above the taverna stay C. and his wife M., brother-in-law and sister of R. and D., our neighbours here. C. owns the beach restaurant in Blankenberge where Thanassis and his family have run the Greek restaurant for the last 6 months. We chat up and learn that C. and M. still have serious plans to buy the plot of land behind us and build a house there. The fact that C.'s granddaughter was charmed by Samos will have contributed, we assume. They show

us a book with examples of houses. One has a patio with a tile roof exactly as we want - I take a picture of it. We are able to tip them on several issues.

Thanassis we spot a few days later while talking and gesticulating to a man on the piece of land where he had planned his photovoltaic project - phew, any advance going on? In the meanwhile we start our own project of painting the outside walls of the house - with a combination of acrylic and chalk that Takis recommended us. It takes some time (and paint) because the surface is rather rough so you have to take a small brush to cover the holes. Because it is still warm we work either early in the morning or late in the afternoon. We take a break one evening to have dinner in Balos at Mimis (lamb chops!) with H. and B. before the restaurant closes for the winter.

After a little bit under two weeks of hard work the walls are painted and the terrace is scraped clean of spoiled paint. So we relax wholeheartedly when the M. family comes to spend their autumn vacation with us. The nice weather still hasn't left us so we make several trips into the countryside. We do another mountain safari first to Pythagoras' cave and on over the Kerkis mountain. We take the beautiful coast road to Drakei. We drive all the way up to the Bournias where J. discovers a rare autumn crocus behind the little cyclamen. At night we dine at our terrace or in a little restaurant which is still open. The family is lucky: one day a chameleon slowly crosses the road and a jackal runs in front of the car when we drive home at night. And the green toad has reappeared in the vegetable garden. The cats show up and all are spoiled by daughter C. Tabby gets so tame that he is hugged and stroked by all of us. M. helps out with the painting of the last piece of the walls at the cam of the roof. Therefore he is forgiven when at one time he sits down on the lid of the plastic box with the swimming pool gear - which immediately collapses.

When the M. family has left Takis comes round to coat the roof - which we'd asked because of the leaking last spring. He makes a thorough job of it - and now the waiting is for the rains. We also discuss some new projects for the house. And, the ordered wooden cabin finally seems to be underway - it will be delivered within 15 days. That'll be the day ... will we still be here when that happens?

The weather changes. A first real downpour starts. To our dismay the roof still leaks considerably. I have the presence of mind to grab the videocamera and record the big drops steadily leaking from the roof. When Thanassis drops by I show him the shots. Aris arrives several days later to put a new layer of cement on the cams of the roof. When I see him admiring the large olives on the tree near the bedroom I tell him he can have them for we have no plans with them this year. You don't need to tell him twice and very expertly he covers the ground under the tree with a sheet of plastic and starts picking. Thanassis calls him from the piece of land across the road where the photovoltaic park is to be build, so he returns the next day to finish the picking. The other trees with far smaller olives do not interest him it appears. I guess he got about three kilos of olives from that one tree.

As the olives have been picked, a few days later, when the sun is high in the sky again, I set out to cut off a branch from this olive tree with our new electric saw so that the car can be parked in its shade - when it has grown some more. After that I take a closer look at the other olive trees at our entrance road and decide that it is high time to give them a good trimming as it hasn't been done for three years. F. is concerned that I saw off too much, but when Thanassis arrives a little later he praises me for my good work. When I have worked my way through all the trees our entrance road looks really civilised again.

In the meantime we also planted some new little olive trees on a terrace above the swimming pool to give us some privacy in due time. However the sun continues to shine so we carry some buckets with water uphill to quench their thirst. I also prepare the vegetable garden for the winter. The melons which will not ripen anymore I pick to make chutney out of them. I take out the tomato plants and remove the remainders of the zucchini and melon plants. Weeds have already risen after the first rains so I pull them out too. Behind the house I find a dead snake, not so big, with a little piece taken out of his body. Dropped by a bird of prey? It is photographed to be added to the collection.

We book our flight back to the Netherlands but find out that we have waited too long, the prices have risen considerably. As a reaction we also book return flights for next February and a single trip for the end of April. Those still are very cheap so we at least earned that money!

The pool robot dives in for the last time, to remove the sand so that will not clog the outlet when we empty the pool. Tabby, our self-adopted tame tomcat, looks at it flabbergasted. "Old Nessie's back!" we see him thinking, a bit afraid. After that we open the outlet to empty the pool slowly, so that the orchard in the valley beneath us will not be transformed into a soggy swamp This takes some four days.

We are very popular with the neighbouring cats these days, we assume there are not many people left to feed them. Vieze (Dirty), Zusje (Sissy), Fluffy, Little Skinny, Dropi, Mavro (Blacky), Tabby all of them drop by for their bowl of cat food. They do some light growling at each other but mostly they tolerate each other as long as they stay out of each other's way. Tabby follows me everywhere, even to the car. When I close the door his tail is in between, so he gives a huge cry. Quickly I open the door again and he walks away, offended. But no harm is done I see as a few moments later he turns the tip of his tail into a nice curve again. When he keeps hanging out with us, we put the iPad on the floor with the game of chasing the mouse on the cheese. He looks at it interestingly but only scores 200 (= he tapped only twice), so no future world champion here.

We go to see H. in Balos for an ouzo before she leaves home, B. joins us. Originally we had planned to eat at the Cypriot restaurant, but when I call cook Kyriakos on his cell phone it turns out that he's on a holiday in France. I hand out rucola from our vegetable garden to everybody for we will not be able to finish it all ourselves. For the rest of the leftovers I foresee that we will finish most of it, and we can take some with us in the suitcases.

As the temperature midday is not so high anymore, I take out a big plastic garbage bag one day and collect all the rubbish along the roadside to the garbage container. I also find some colchicum which are flowering - a month later that at E.'s up in Koumaradei. They also flower at the entrance road to H. and J.'s, where we take a look for leakages after the rain. G. and D.'s house is also dry, but they do not have colchicum flowering under the orange tree as G. emailed us.

We drive to Karlovassi for a last time to have our internet bill from Vodafone automatically paid from our bank account and to wish Takis en Despina and their children "Καλο Χειμώνα" (good winter). We run into Big Takis who's just returned from the USA to apply for American citizenship for his children. He promises to send us an offer for solar panels for heating the swimming pool. We also have our hair cut at Maria's for the ridiculously cheap fare of €10 pp.

A second rain storm passes over our house, and alas, still leakage. We are assured that this winter it will be really really taken care of. A beautiful double rainbow afterwards gives us some consolation. We also come to an agreement with Thanassis on some other winter works: a gate at the entrance road (to keep off curious tourists and others), a patio between the house and the pool for shade in the summer and a ramp along the steps of the stairs of the swimming pool.

When the sun returns I pull out the plants which have started to grow on the upper part of the entrance road. While doing this I see Thanassis and Roula driving on to the ground for the photovoltaic park and not much later a van with gravel empties its contents over there. It returns several times to unload new heaps of gravel. Πω, πω, will the works really start? It seems that our wooden cabin now definitely is under-/away from Roumenia

As the nice weather holds on for several days I take out my sculpture gear to continue on the dial of the sun dial I am making. I do get on and in the mean time I can have a good look what's happening at the photovoltaic-park-to-be.

We have a last drink at Maraki's in Koumeika with B. and J., us being sort of the die-hards. Maraki is pleasantly surprised that we are still around. Her son Giorgos has not yet finished the works at R. and D.'s house so we cannot take the keys of their house with us to hand them over. Just as I foresaw We'll have to collect them in February then. Afterwards we have some souvlaki's at the local snack bar.

I take the last remainders out of the vegetable garden and sow some seeds and plant some shoots of local plants. Just to see what has grown next spring. Just before our last dinner the gas bottle is

empty but luckily we have a spare one. It has lasted from the Easter dinner we had all together. We e-mail neighbour F. in Maastricht to turn up the heating one day before we arrive.

We put the garden furniture inside the house - the wooden cabin is not yet available - and close all the shutters. After a last beautiful hot and sunny autumn day we lock the door early in the morning and drive away - only for 3 1/2 months this time.