

DREAMHOUSE IN GREECE 6 - 2013

January 2013

To cut the winter in half, we decide to spend two weeks on Samos at the end of February. Just to see how the climate is. And hopefully there will be lots of flowers after a mild winter We sent a message to enquire how the works are progressing. And blimey, on the last day of the month we get an answer that the wooden cabin is ready! The other works are progressing according to plan, we are told.

February 2013

During a nice weekend in Flanders we hand over the parts for a new chest in the bedroom to R. and D. In June they will drive to Samos in their car. We also set up a schedule for transfers from and to the airport with the neighbours and their cars coming spring.

We receive pictures of the wooden cabin. Huge, is our first impression. Few windows though We pay the remainder of the money as promised. A week before we leave I reinstall F's "old" iMac for Takis and his family, each user their own space. Because of its frailty, we take the computer with us as hand luggage. According to the technical specifications it weighs 9.7 kilos, just below the permitted 10 kg of Transavia.

The day before we fly to Samos we do not take the evening train to Schiphol as usual. Since there is an interesting exhibition on Troy in Amsterdam, we decide to take the morning train to Amsterdam and to have a look at it. The journey with the train however is a reflection of NS (Dutch Railways) policy. We asked neighbour B. to drop us off at the backside of the station since we feared the bus ride from our house to the station in the rush hour with two heavy suitcases might be a bit tricky. Just after he dropped us off we find that the elevator to the passage over the rails is out of order due to service maintenance. I get help from one of the workers but F. face is all red when he arrives at the top of the stairs. When we arrive at our quai it shows that the train we picked is overdue so we will miss our connection. We are then allowed to take the train before 9 o'clock with our reduced tickets as an exception. But that one is about to depart so we have to hurry to catch it, dragging our heavy suitcases behind us. We jump into the first open door which closes immediately behind us and the train rolls out of the station. We then worm ourselves plus luggage through several 2nd class compartments and settle down in the 1st class. Pfew.... As the train enters Sittard station it is just after 9 and then our compartment is filled to the brim with chattering housewives. It seems that the big Household Fair in Amsterdam has started and there was an offer for a cheap upgrade to 1st class after 9 o'clock NS Thank you very much! I contemplate as we reach our destination, tucked in between suitcases and backpacks and a computer ... Anyway, at Schiphol Airport we quickly find a really huge locker where we can store the luggage and after a cup of coffee we head to Amsterdam. There we first walk to the Sculpture Store where I get some information on electric equipment for sculpturing. Then we have a nice lunch with a glass of bad wine on the Haarlemmerdijk. After that we take public transportation to the museum since the wind is freezing cold.

The exhibition is small but impressive, including the gold mask Schliemann found in Mykene (the real one, on loan from Athens) and the jewelry he took from Troy for his own wife. After that we have a look at the Egyptian, Greek and Etruscan collection of the museum. Then it is time to meet with my friend and former colleague E. who lives in Amsterdam. We have a lot to catch up and after a nice Vietnamese meal we say goodbye to her at half past 10 already. We try to take the high speed train to Schiphol Airport but again this one is broke so we change to the slow train. We collect our luggage and have some more coffee until 4 o'clock the next morning when we can check in. The big computer gives no trouble as hand luggage and so we safely arrive on Samos where it is cloudy but some 12°C. We connect the battery of the car and drive away. However the braking oil of the car has accumulated unevenly in the system so for the first dozen kilometres it thumps whenever we brake. But it slowly gets less. We are well in time to run errands in the local Lidl.

Just before dark we arrive at our house, where F. is able to open the new gate at the beginning of our entrance after some efforts. We quickly have a look around the house in

the fading daylight. the wooden cabin really is nice and big - but without glass in it. The ramp at the steps in the swimming pool looks solid. As does the new canopy from the house to the swimming pool will provide us with shelter during the summer. We also notice that the solar park behind our premises ready, surrounded by a fence and cameras. We unpack the car as it gets dark. Doing so the box with eggs falls onto the ground so we have fried eggs as an evening meal instead of the planned pizza. The electric heaters are switched on to maximum to get rid of the dampness. I even have the energy to clear away all our new things and to start the bread machine to bake a bread. In bed I watch some tv with the electric blanket "on" to warm me. We however do not open the bedroom window because of the temperature so we cannot check whether the owl passes by to wish us goodnight.

The next morning we wake up around 9 o'clock as the blinds from the bedroom window are blown open by the wind. We want to rest today so we decide not to go to Karlovasi but instead hang around the house. We cannot visit Thanassis either since the whole family is in Athens until tomorrow. I start with a big vacuum cleaning and after that I take the measures of the wooden cabin. Yesterday evening Blackie showed up for some cat food tidbits and today Zusje (Littel Sister) shows up. F. kindly feeds them all. During lunch we see that Athens has been hit by enormous showers of rain. I decide to take a closer look at the solar park. When I walk uphill I see a heap of roof tiles stacked on the ground - leftovers from our new canopy? The mayor drives by and honks for greeting us. This morning we also heard Giannis. As for the February flowers, besides the horned sorrel and some yellow-blue grapes I cannot discover many new species. Only some regular sorrel-like looking small yellow thing.

A distant thunder rumbles and it starts to rain. The showers that hit Athens now have reached Samos. We cut a piece of thick plastic into size and cover window in the door of the wooden cabin with it. In the "big" house, the roof seems to be ok now, no more leaking. Probably Thanassis put new tiles on it too, we contemplate. We make some plans for the wooden cabin and watch tv. We still are tired from the journey so go to sleep early.

Saturday we wake up really rested. After another small shower the sun breaks through. We get into the car to say hello to Thanassis and Roula. Roula is at home alone, it shows that she did not accompany the men to Athens. "Hugo's" cat Marouf and her children Spic and Span come out to greet us and get themselves stroked. Thanassis is in his vegetable garden so we go to say hello to him too. Aris is at work over there, he has a big pig on a rope. To slaughter? I ask. No, she (?) is about to go to the meadow. Thanassis has made that by fencing off a piece of this vegetable garden alongside the road. We leave for Karlovassi and F. calls Despina. She is at home but her husband Takis has gone to Vathi with Thanassis jr. for his soccer game. We walk to her house but at the bottom floor we see her brother-in-law Psylotakis so we go to say hello to him first. Then it becomes clear that Despina and Takis and their children do not live in the top apartment anymore, they have moved to somewhere else in Karlovassi. Their daughter Natalia comes to collect us on her bike after Psylotakis called them. They have moved to a smaller apartment near the church. We have some coffee and afterwards drive to the Vodafone store to have our internet connection refreshed. Cheaper again, 20 GB for 50 euro a month, first year € 35/month. We also get done that we get automatic payment again.

We buy some low calcium Loutraki water for making tea at the little supermarket in the city centre and drive back home. There the sun is shining nicely so we have lunch on the terrace and I spend the rest of the day by clearing our premises from thrown away garbage by the workmen. Half burnt plastic and batteries, really! The big branches cut off from the olive trees I use to make a natural separation at the end of our terrain. The thin ropes neighbour D. had used long have been broken.

As the sun sets Motty shows up for a bowl of cat food. The temperature drops so we go inside. I try to start the internet but like always I do not get connected. Probably we'll have to back to the Vodafone shop again next Monday. As usual. I hope we will be able to combine it with installing Takis' computer.

Sunday is sunny again. We take a lazy morning around the house. I start to remove some weeds from the garden. In the afternoon we drive to Balos where we meet with H. and her

help Amanda. We find them enjoying the sunshine along the seaside. We go to H.'s room where we enjoy the sunshine some more on her balcony, meanwhile chatting up. When we drive back home we try to enter G. and D.'s and H. and J.'s houses but the doors are jammed. We plan to bring along some carbon powder with oil next time to get rid of the rust. At home I try the internet again and golly, it works! Though the speed resembles the bush drums in the old days.

On Monday we take the computer to Takis for installation. But he has mislaid the paper with all the passwords so we have to return the next day. We drive back home where we continue to weed the garden. Tuesday we finish the installation of the computer and then drive to Vathi to pay our road tax. The system has changed so Takis cannot do it for us anymore without any proof. And since the deadline of January 12th has already passed we have to pay double. So now we pay exactly as much as we do in the Netherlands ... umpf! At the end of this year we will give Takis all the car papers so he will be able to do it for us again. On the way back we drop by the glass factory to collect the glass for the windows of the wooden cabin. As we say goodbye to the man he answers that he hopes to see us again ... which sounds a bit funny as if he hopes that the glass will brake and we have to come back. But it arrives at our house all in one piece luckily. So I continue weeding and F. starts painting the cabin.

That also continues the next Wednesday. But since weeding is hard work, I decide to pick up the camera and go and look for some new plants in the afternoon. On Thanassis' storage ground I find a new species of Arum. And just before C. and R.'s entrance road I detect a beautiful dark brown orchid. On the sides of the road to the rock shore at the sea I notice a yellow Fritillaria and some other yellow orchid. On the rocks at the seashore there are many Matthiola's and a spring Mandrake. F. calls: Thanassis has arrived, so I walk back to the house. Roula is there too. They brought us a big bag of eggs and Thanassis says that he'll bring us a rabbit tomorrow. We talk a bit on in Greek and we try to convince them that they really should open up Bella Vista I this summer, if only for drinks for the people who come to the beach for a swim.

Thursday we continue weeding and painting. I now start for plant pictures immediately after lunch for yesterday some of the plants had already closed their flowers. While I take new pictures of the mandrake at sea, I suddenly become aware that I am almost crushing the purple Romulea under my feet. It is so tiny, flower not even 1 cm in diameter, that I hadn't seen it at first. From the pictures in my books I had thought it much larger. I walk the road to the pebble beach but there is nothing much to see concerning new species of flowering plants. But a new jetty for boats is being made. The pebbles have been shoveled aside already with a big bulldozer. Afterwards I try to open the front door of G. and D.'s and H. and J.'s houses, but I do not succeed. It looks like they are stuck somehow.

Back at our house I prepare two Dutch applepies, one for us and one for Thanassis and Roula. The grumpy man dropped oranges and lemons while he passed by in his jeep. Later on he gives us a bag full of bitter tasting chorta, greens, don't know what we'll do with that I still have a bag of walnuts so I decide to bake a walnut cake for him, together with the eggs from Thanassis and Roula.

Friday we go to Karlovassi to both have a haircut at Maria's. She only can do it at 1 o'clock so we take a leisurely morning with some errands, a cup of coffee at the old plateia and we drive up to the little church at Paleo Karlovassi where we take a short walk.

Back at the house F. finishes the painting of the entrance gate. I gather the stray garbage from the plateau behind the wooden cabin and cut away some bushes on what is to be a path to the neighbouring olive grove one day. We need a wheelbarrow for the gravel, we contemplate. As the sun sinks to the horizon we notice that the cold wind has disappeared so we watch the sunset on the terrace.

Saturday I set out to pick the lemons of C. and R. two little trees. They will only come at the end of May and they will have rotted lying on the ground by then. So we have their permission to take them. It is a bucket full and I already have taken out all my preserving jars to fill them with pickled lemons. When I'm finished pickint I take a look at the little tree at D. and L.'s house which is full of little orange kumquats. Interesting. Both C. and R.

and D. and L. don't have any oranges hanging from their citrus trees. Thanassis drops by to bring us a big rabbit from his shed. He already cleaned it but I take out the heart, longs, liver and kidneys for the first cat who drops by. This appears to be Tabby and he gobbles it up hurriedly. As a reward we are allowed to stroke him again. I stuff the rabbit with oranges, garlic and a bottle of dark Belgian Carolus beer (we had bought that in Karlovassi anticipating the rabbit) and after two hours in the oven we both eat a leg, the rest we let cool down.

When we take a breath of fresh air before turning in we suddenly see lights at D. and L.'s house. We did not see them pass by, but on the other hand we were probably indulging in the rabbit's legs.

Sunday we continue weeding and painting. F. starts on the inside of the wooden cabin ; the painting scheme fits the weather perfectly since today is a bit cloudy with a drop of rain from time to time. Thanassis drops by again, this time with a big fish, a sort of eel, from his freezer. I cut it into three pieces with a heavy knife. Two parts go directly into the freezer again, the third we thaw for dinner. The head we keep for the cats, and again Tabby is the lucky winner. Little Skinny is interested too but gets chased away by Tabby, who then contently gnaws at it for about half an hour. In the afternoon I fill all the jars with lemon slices, salt and lemon juice to the brim. For dinner I make filets out of the fish and roll them in some flour before I bake them very shortly in some olive oil. A drop of lemon juice on it is the finishing touch. Later on I crack all the walnuts while watching tv for tomorrow I plan to bake walnut cake.

Monday I start handing out the jars with pickled lemons. First I drive to R. and D.'s where I put it behind their house in the shade. Aris is expanding their new vegetable garden; hmm, were they inspired by my vegetable garden last year? I take some pictures to send to them and drive to Thanassis and Roula's, who are not at home. So I put the jar outside on a table. Next to Giorgos, who waves at me when I turn around the corner of the road. I had not seen that a big lorry is standing on the narrow road, the driver is chatting to Giorgos. I have to drive backwards uphill around the corner into Giorgos' backyard. I finally succeed but with sweaty hands ...

Our vegetable garden now is next for weeding. The lower part is done at the end of the day. F. has painted the floor of the wooden cabin this morning and since it is sunny and windy it is dry pretty soon. So we are able to store some furniture in it which first was in my studio. Not everything alas since it might still rain a lot. So the stored items must be fungus-proof. After that I bake the walnut cakes. They tend to be a bit dark before they are done. I assume the temperature knob on my gas oven is not correct; next time I must put it 10 - 20 % lower. Tuesday afternoon we get a visit from the three H.'s from Amsterdam and the Greek help Amande. They take a look inside and around the house. I prepared the rest of the fish for them so we have a nice lunch inside. Afterwards we have coffee with walnut cake on the terrace again, it is lovely sunny weather. Tabby manages to steal a slice of walnut cake as I already put it on the terrace table. Little rascal! After all the fish scraps he already got. At night we notice that neighbour D. has left again.

Wednesday morning we drive to the salt lake at Psili Ammos past Pythagorion. At first it looks like there are no flamingos present, but as we walk on a bit we see about 40 of them hidden in a remote corner of the lake. Nice! On the way back we drop by our friends of the Ambrosia restaurant and the Kalokairi Bar at Pythagorion, but as they all are working and painting for the start of the new season - and Robinson's is still closed as well we decide to have lunch at home. We drive back by taking the scenic rout via Spatharei. After we say goodbye to Roula we spent the afternoon on the terrace in the sun. Full of energy we decide to cut the grass and the thistles along the concrete road to the wooden cabin with the electric cord mower and I even take out the weeds around the herbs which have survived the winter in the vegetable garden. The it is time to put everything back inside. The grumpy man drives by in his jeep but I am too late handing him the jar with pickled lemons - he does not notice me waving at him. When it gets dark we close the shutters again. We dine on some leftovers and go to sleep early after some tv.

The alarm wakes us at 10 past 5 and I put the last remains of the freezer in the almost empty suitcase. After a journey with no troubles we arrive in a drooling Maastricht around half past 6 in the evening.

March 2013

March gives us a vicious last uprise of winter. We stay indoors as much as possible. I spend my time updating the flora with the February plants and sowing covers for the old cushions of the small garden chairs. Ikea already sells the spring garden collection so we buy a few new models of solar lamps for the wooden cabin.

Half March we xerox the car papers of our 4WD Terios and the key of the new entrance gate. We drive to Mol in Belgium where we arranged a meeting at E & R's. The last one underwent surgery and hasn't left for Samos yet. Usually he flies in January to go and paint in his studio in all quietness until the beginning of May when E. and the dog come over with the first direct charter. We also meet R. (from D.) who gets our car papers and the key. They will fly to Samos during Belgian Easter Break and will drive from the airport to their home in our car. E. and R. and their dog will fly in May, together.

When we discover that we still have an enormous amount of old guilder-stamps which will be no longer valid after the 1st of November this year, we decide to send a big parcel to Maraki's tavern in Koumeika with goodies for ourselves. Saves us carrying it in and out busses, trains and airports. R. promises to collect it for us.

April 2013

At the beginning of April the temperatures still are freezing low. I set myself to go to the Friday market in the city centre to buy some fabric for tablecloths. As I sow them we envy R & D who text us that they enjoy themselves at 22 degrees C. They also send some nice pictures of plants and animals and inform us that our parcel has safely arrived at Maraki's. Which makes us decide to send another 2 parcels to Samos.

When they are back we arrange at Hasselt to meet with almost the entire παρέα to exchange car keys and stories. After that I try to fit everything we want to take with us into the 2 big suitcases. I succeed in doing this except for three new cushions for the small garden chairs. Which we will have to take with us in July then. And after a sniff of spring, a farewell dinner with F. and B., a last glimpse at the now almost four months old baby gorilla at the GAIA Zoo, and a mediocre meal at the Greek restaurant Samos at Heerlen, F. and B. drop us at the station on a chilly Sunday evening, for the one but last train to Schiphol Airport. Where the NS (Dutch Railways) again have a surprise for us: trains do not go any further than the last but one station and we have to find the regional bus to the airport all by ourselves. In which we succeed.

We arrive on Samos and shop and get gas before we drive home. There we find out that nothing has been done yet about the swimming pool. We get this sort of Echternach-feeling, just like the procession held over there: 2 steps forward and one step backwards. As a consolation a dozen or two ripe strawberries beckon us to pick and eat them. We unpack and go to sleep after the electric heaters have been set on maximum capacity for a few hours to get rid of the dampness.

The next morning I leave for the spot where R. has described me where he found the bee-orchid two weeks ago. I find the spot but the orchid already is all dried out. I then walk my usual route on the roads around our house to look for "new" plants to take pictures of. I do not find many, just a big sage-like plant. It is near the little meadow where the early giant orchid is, and there I see some other dried-out orchid. I climb into the meadow to see what sort they might be, but they are already too dried out to determine. I also see the (green) leaves of the early giant orchid, and when I take a closer look I notice that the flower has been picked. I turn around shaking my head at this act of vandalism and then I suddenly see a small bee orchid flowering under an olive tree. It is much smaller than I had expected, some 20 cm high and the flower 1.5 cm in diameter. I take many pictures of it.

I walk back to the house where we have our own orchids, 6 in total. This means that they are returning on our premises after the moving of the ground when the house was built, four and a half years ago. One orchid I think is a hybrid between the holy orchid and the fragrant bug orchid. I continue walking to the three houses uphill and find another two bee orchids, one only 50 meters away from the entrance to C. and R.'s house.

Thanassis drops by and promises to start on the swimming pool right next day. Which indeed proves to be true. But they do not have enough paint so Aris returns the next day to finish the job and we can start filling it the day thereafter. We occupy ourselves with removing the weeds from the vegetable garden and mowing "the lawn". The Lidl mower however breaks down permanently so we drive to Karlovassi to buy a new one. We also buy tomato and sweet pepper plants and sow vegetables, fruit and herbs. The temperature rises steadily so we start to water the young olive trees and the fig trees. One of the fig trees has little bulbs on the branches which I hope will turn into fruits.

We continue the next days weeding and mowing which have priority over the inside of the house, which actually also deserves some thorough cleaning. The Echternach-feeling returns when I find out that the new food processor I bought at Lidl's is the wrong one; I drive back one hour to swap it for the right one. Also the ropes given for the new mower are the wrong ones.

We drop by at H. in Balos. In the hotel where she stays everybody is busy preparing for the opening of the tourist season. On the way back I take pictures of the large blue irises which flower along the roadside. After we informed Maraki that another two parcels are on their way by post. She complains about her hearing aid but it seems she understands the message.

In the weekend we first have a nice lunch together with H. at Kyriakos' who now is the proud owner of Stella's Cypriot Restaurant. Kyrialos tries out some new dishes on us of which the grilled Haloumi (Cypriot goat cheese) with rosemary flavour is absolutely delicious. On Sunday we drive to Ormos where we indulge ourselves in garides saganaki (scampi in tomato-feta sauce) and very very fresh grilled mélounes-fish. In the meantime the swimming pool is filled to the brim so we turn on the filtering system after a thorough cleaning of the filter. The swallows and the wagtails have also discovered the water in the pool so they drop by for a sip.

The vegetable garden is cleared of the weeds and sown in so the next days I clean the shutters of the windows and the terraces. When I spray my cleaning mixture of soap, water and vinegar in between the hole of one of the shutters, a small snake leaves, offended. It is still cool in the morning so it does not move that fast. It is a juvenile coin-masked snake, we discover later when we look it up from the picture we took. Non-poisonous, but we did not know that when we helped it into the other world (just like the two first scorpions of the year). F. continues to work on the wooden cabin and on fattening the stray cats which pass by. Aris passes by with some bills; we decide to drop by the young lady of the Vodafone shop to check whether they really are paid automatically.

Due to the high temperatures the orchids start to bloom everywhere. Each day we discover more of them between our olive trees, so, together with those alongside the road under our house, we come to a total of 32. Be it only 2 species, holy orchid and fragrant bug orchid, but we do not complain.

After the outside of house and surroundings is finished. I turn inside for a good spring cleaning the week before Easter (as a matter of fact you should be ready before this Big/Holy Week, as is the habit in Greece ...) Aris drops by to report that the first parcel has arrived by post at Maraki's. A few days later he delivers the second one himself, as he comes to install the irrigation system for the young olive trees above the vegetable garden. They only need water once every 10 days, he explains, as he shows the tap to open and close it.

The temperatures stay high, 30 midday, and as a consequence there are a lot of insects so we have to use the robot several times to clean the pool floor of sunken insects. I scoop out many from the surface. The water temperature rises from 24 to 25 degrees, still a little bit too cold for a swim. In the vegetable garden the vegetables grow hard. The wooden cabin is

decorated and the spare beds and other furniture are put inside. On which “my” room in the house finally starts to look what it was meant for, a studio instead of a storage room.

When we go shopping at Lidl’s again we stop for coffee at Manolis’ and Effi’s. After that we have to go to the post office and there F. to his luck finds out that employee Stamatis is just as big a (Samos) stamp collector as himself. They happily chat along and F. buys a memorial album for 20 euro on 100 years Samos officially part of Greece. And some minutes later Stamatis’ friend Evangelis drops by, of which F. already bought - not knowing he was a Samiote - some stamps via the Internet. They exchange addresses and F. promises to return some time with his Samos stamp collection.

On the 30th of April we watch some of the highlights of the coronation. At Easter, all cleaning is finished. I drive to the new vegetable garden of (absent) neighbours R. and D. to cut some fresh lettuce. They also have (apart from some 10 orchids on their “lawn” and alongside the road to their vegetable garden) some other sort of greens, which I take for some other sort of lettuce but I’m not sure. We’ll have to ask neighbours G. and D. and H. and J. then, when they arrive in a few days.

May 2013

After Easter we pick up our neighbours from the airport. To celebrate their return we have a nice dinner at Mimis’ in Balos where I indulge myself in their gorgeous lamb chops.

The temperature drops a little bit so we decide to spend a day on Greek bureaucracy for our paperwork. Also, our Greek bank account is not able to cope with e-banking anymore. When we inquire at the bank it shows that our ID-cards, on which we opened the account, expire this month. And in the Greek way that means that our bank account is closed until further notice. That also explains why our internet connection did not work anymore as well. We have our passports with us, which expire in two years (!), so after half an hour of work everything is put back to normal again. We drive back home in a light drizzle.

The weather gets a little bit better so we arrange to meet with E. to drive up the Ampelos to look for orchids and other plants. It is a well-spent day. We drive all the way up to the little Prof. Illias church on top (1100 m) where we walk around in clouds. We do not find as much orchids as I had hoped for, but the ones we do find are real beauties. We also find some interesting new plants. Maybe we can go back at the end of May to see the late ones.

We have lunch on the plateia at Vourliotes and then drive past Pnaka on a really really steep and narrow road to the Antwerp couple N. and M. who have some cottages they rent. They have a beautiful garden full of flowers, with a lawn, vegetables, fruit trees etc. Oh well, they have been working on it non-stop for 8 years now N. also makes her own fruit liqueurs.

We have a final drink at the plateia in Mytilini and drop E. at her car across the bakery shop in Pyrgos, where we all drive home.

Next Sunday is a beautiful sunny day. We have lunch at Mimis in Balos, again, and again yummie lamb chops for me. When we have finished eating we see a big group of dolphins in the sea playing leapfrog for us. How cute! We haven’t seen them so clearly tumbling over each other yet.

That night the weather changes. A huge thunderstorm passes over our house. And to our dismay, the roof starts leaking again so in the middle of the night we move the dining table away and put towels on the floor But the next morning we find out that the leaking was just for a short while. We assume that the wood of the ceiling has set again after it shrunk considerably in the extreme hot April weather and that now it has swollen again.

There is some more rain that morning. We hear a car honking at our entrance gate and it appears that Rodopi and Giannis have shown up with an enormous coco sponge cake and cookies for us. I really must make a huge amount of apple pie to hand out to everyone, I decide. Tabby shows up like a soaked sponge and let us rub him dry with an old towel. After that he gulps down a bowl of dry cat food and finds himself a dry spot to rest from his cold night.

I pass the time to thoroughly analyse all my orchid pictures. If you study them closely it becomes clear that there are more species than I first thought. Especially if you compare them with the internet site www.greekorchids.gr.

The weather gets better during that week so soon we are back in shorts again. Daughter K. and her husband J. from neighbours H. and J. arrive so I can give them all a big part of the enormous coco sponge cake. Thursdays we do our shopping at the Lidl's; F. takes his album with Samos stamps to show to Dimitris from the post office in Pythagorion. We have coffee at Manolis and later on lunch at his neighbours of the Ambrosia restaurant.

Fridays we drop by at H. in Balos to congratulate her on her birthday. Saturday we decide to make a trip to the north-eastern point of the island. There seems to be a monastery over there from which the view must be superb. But first we drop by at E. and R. to say hi to R. and the dog which we had not yet seen since they arrives. The road signs to the monastery are scarce so we drive up the wrong way. After we wurred our car past a tree on a village square we end up on a country road into the hills, away from the monastery so to see at the position of the sun. When we see some people walking we stop to ask them the way. They are Dutch and with the aid of our and their map we find where we are. We turn around but at the next turnoff we find ourselves on the road alongside the coast. Which is very beautiful so we decide to follow that one instead.

When we are looking for a place to have a nice lunch along that coast we are stopped by a man who so to see suffered from polio some time ago. He makes clear that he has to go to Vathi so that is where we are headed then. When he had gotten out at Vathi we decide to have lunch there. But our favourite restaurant has closed down and we wind up in some sort of snack bar. When we pass along the town hall - F. has heard that is was the old prince's palace, we run into the couple we met in the hills this morning. When we hear that they have to wait two hours before the next bus goes to their hotel we offer to bring them and drop them off at Agios Konstantinos.

Sunday is a lazy day. When at sunset I clear the swimming pool of insects, a man presents himself at our gate. He is Manolis, he introduces himself, and he lives in a house on the beach below us. We invite him over for a drink and get into a conversation. He is born and raised in Skouraiika, he tells us, but he now lives in Geneva. As it appears he knows a lot about the history of Samos - his father was one of the leading citizens of Vathi we understand - so we have a lot to talk about.

The weeds on our premises have grown a lot due to the last rains so the next days are spent cutting them with our new electric trimmer. Which is heavy work especially at temperatures above 30C in the sun. However the pool water has become agreeably warm (26 - 27C) so a nice swim awaits after the work for the day has been done. I also bake big amounts of apple pie. When our (new) trimmer also breaks down on the third day we give up and ask Aris to come and do the job with his heavier equipment.

E.drops by with a jeep full of friends among which Brabant F. and E. from Ireon which we met last year. E. is preparing a jeep safari next Friday for a group of Russian tour leaders who stay at the Dorissa Bay Hotel. She has also been in contact with some Kostas Kalatzis, a Samian who knows a lot about the orchids here and with which we might make a trip. He only speaks Greek so that will be a good exercise for us!

The nights still are relatively cool (16C) but you can perceive summer approaching. The cicadas start to chirp at night. One windy but warm day when we make a tour we notice a strange sound coming from the car as we brake. It gets louder so we head for the garage. There it shows that the brake pads on the front wheels have almost worn out. Probably due to the fact that we have to do a lot of breaking on our mountain tours since the car has automatic gear - we cannot shift gears to brake with the aid of the engine. They are immediately replaced for a relatively little sum of money and we solemnly promise to make more use of the mountain gear in our car.

I cannot get hold Rodopi to take the apple pie I baked for them, so one day I follow Giannis as he hobbles by in his mini-van; down the road along the little chapel of Agios Giannis to reach their beach house at the back of the road. There it shows that Manolis from a few days ago also lives there, next to them. So I tell Rodopi to give him a piece of the apple pie too.

In the following weekend we dine with a lot of people at the Cypriotic restaurant. The Monday thereafter we pick up our neighbours C. and R. from the airport and enjoy a lunch under a clear blue sky at Papas Beach behind Ireon, in a hidden little bay, where you can also rent a parasol and sun beds. Tuesday gives us some clouds though it remains relatively warm, but not warm enough for a dive into the pool like yesterday. During the night a fierce wind starts to blow from the Sahara; we hear how the empty bottles and cans from our container behind the house are blown away.

That Wednesday morning the wind still blows strongly. We drive to Pythagorion, where there is no wind to our amazement. We board the ferry boat to Kusadasi and a little after 10 o'clock we disembark. S. picks us up with her rented car. She is on holiday in Turkey with her friend G. and the four of us drive some 75 kms to Didyma to admire the impressive Apollo temple. After that we still find time for a quick look at the excavations at Milete. I try to find the Roman frigidarium (cold baths) with the sculptures for the second time and again do not succeed (later I find out that it is the newly restored building which I took for a restaurant). However I do a big stroll on the vast area which is good for my health.

Further on in the direction of Kusadasi we see the columns of the temple at Priena rising through the forest on a hill, but we do not have time anymore to go there since our ferry boat will depart shortly. S. drops us off in front of the harbour building; they will continue their sight seeing trip to Efesos which will be open till 19.00h (thus missing the nice little museum in the nearby modern village of Selcuk). We board the ferry and since the wind has started blowing fiercely in Turkey too, we have a wavy trip back to Pythagorion. When we embark, we can choose between being sprayed by the waves which blow over the wall of the quay, or getting our shoes wet by the big puddles which have already formed on the quay. We arrive home exactly at sunset.

The next day Aris drops by to help us out with cutting the weeds around the terraces and the pool. His heavy machine fixes it in half an hour. The weather is sunny and warm again, with no wind, so after he's done we serve him some cold beers. The rest of the day is spent on cleaning the terraces and removing the blown-in and cut-off plants from the swimming pool. The weather stays a bit unstable. 25 degrees C during the day, an occasional fierce wind, some drops of rain, and, as a nice supplement, cool nights on which we sleep like roses (old saying in Dutch).

June 2013]

Saturday night we drive to Skouraiika for a drink in the new taverna of mayor Kostas and his son. They also prepare us some souvlakis so we are already half full when we enter the other taverna in the village where we earlier that evening promised to grab a bite. We pretend not to know about the feud which has arisen in the village about the fact that the mayor opened a new taverna while just a short while ago he ordered another one to close because of unhygienic working conditions

The next Sunday is that day in the year on which we indulge ourselves in fresh lobster. The 10 of us devour some 3 big lobsters (with spaghetti) and another 2 big grilled fishes under a clear blue sky at Mimis' and Themis' restaurant Akrogiali in Balos. We intensely enjoy the good life.

Monday we do another jeep safari up the Karvounis mountain, this time together with neighbours C. and R. We do not find orchids anymore, but because there is a clear blue sky we have a perfect view of the island from the little church on the summit. We have lunch in Manolates where I meet with Nikitas from the Museum Shop to talk about selling my flora book in his shop. Hmm, quite a business man, we'll see how it will work out. We drive on to Potami west of Karlovassi and then through the shaded valley in the woods with the giant Dragon arums (which are not yet in flower) near the little pool. We admire some beautiful blue and black dragonflies and end the day at Maraki's at the village square of Koumeika.

The rest of the week we occupy ourselves with some household jobs and being lazy. I start to make a n outline with stones of the planned jeu-de-boules field at the back of our yard. It looks good. I remove the weeds and the rest of the stones on the field and the entrance path. Next to the field I also outline an area for a patio in which we can sit in the shade.

Sunday is the last of the holidays for neighbours G. and D. and K. and J. so we have a traditional farewell dinner at Mimis and Themis again. And again lamb chops for me.

Halfway next week the wind turns and now blows from the mountain. That means summer is on its way. When there is no wind a few days later, the temperature rises to summer values. We keep the shutters closed during the day at the sunny side of the house and turn on the fans. When we have our hair cut at Maria's in Karlovassi we hear that the Greek customers also remark that the temperature has risen. It is ideal weather for the swimming pool but alas not for me. Stupid me tripped over a little edge of the terrace and shaved a piece of skin from the palm of my hand. It heals slowly and I dare not enter the water before there is a good crust on it. Instead I try the hammock, in the shade between two olive trees. It is a nice way to relax.

The summer has not won completely yet; a last little depression still grabs the opportunity to shower us for the better part of an hour with a big amount of rain. It does not cool down but the swimming pool suddenly is filled to the brim.

We make another trip with neighbours C. and R. down the coastal roads to the east. Nice area with sleepy villages with beach houses and fishing boats. We return through Pyrgos where we turn into the heart of the village. In a narrow street we have a drink in a taverna with old pictures on the wall and men playing a game of cards.

Neighbours H. and J. leave so we drop by to get their keys to water their plants and feed pregnant Marouf. C. and R. also leave so again on another beautiful Sunday mid-June we have a farewell dinner at Mimis and Themis.

We go shopping at the Lidl's and on our way back we stop at E. and R. to deliver a bunch of curved and twisted olivewood; E wants to make an artwork out of it (I kept some twisted olive trunks for myself to use as ornaments in our yard). We find a message that they've gone to Ireon for lunch with MC and her husband - it is the last day of their vacation. So we also drive over there and enjoy a very fresh and nicely baked fish. After that we visit German/Austrian E. and G. who bought and completely restored an old house in E. and R.'s village. We admire their work and particularly the 2 person shower built in the former stable.

Every day we feed the cats of H. and J. and C. and R. One day Marouf does not show up - in labour? The next day we do see her - she has thinned out and hungrily devours the cat food. The day after that I do not see her - but when I can her through the broken shutter from the neighbouring house (the maternity ward last time) she comes out - really thin this time. Due to nursing? I listen but I do not hear (nor see) any small kittens - I suppose we have to be patient.

E. texts me that she made an appointment with a friend of Kostas Kalatzis the plant man - some Michalis Folas in Vathi. We can visit him next Thursday. So done we arrive in his municipal office and talk about plants and my book for about an hour. It appears that he is co-author of prof. Düll's book on Samos plants and above that - Düll is on Samos at the moment. We arrange to meet everybody that same evening in Agios Konstantinos. We have lunch in Paleokastro at Triantafylla and indeed the mezedes are superb. We talk with a couple from Wallonia - E. really knows everybody on the island - and a Swedish man who lives next to the taverna.

I drive home to have a nice swim - fortunately the wound on my hand has healed for almost a week now - and then we drive via E. to Agios Konstantinos, where we meet in the restaurant of Michalis' brother, Manolis Folas. It is a large group and I am able to show prof. Düll my book after which I get a private lecture on Samos plants. He also helps me identify some plants on my iPad of which I had not yet been able to. At the end of the evening we get his latest book, Plants of the Mediterranean.

The rest of the week we spend on odd jobs and swimming in the pool, for the temperature now definitely has reached summer values. Especially when there is little wind the pool is ideal to cool down.

The Tuesday of the next week we (the two of us, E. and R. and German/Austrian E. and G.) gather for a lunch in Paleokastro at Triantafylla (literally that signifies “thirty leaves”, meaning “Rose”, the last name of the owner). Next Friday we drive to the garage for a major check-up of our car, at a very reasonable price of 160 euro all inclusive. In September we will get new tyres, since they wear out quickly over here in the hot sunny climate and the unpaved stony (mountain) roads. They also help us to make an appointment for the official periodical control at the KTEO, the week thereafter, just before we return to the Netherlands. It has to be in July, due to the number on our license plate.

H. and J.’s cat Marouf goes through a difficult period, just after she got a nest of kittens (which we do not see, but suddenly she is thin again and has large “pointy” nipples). She suddenly looks dirty, ungroomed, and saliva is drooling down her mouth. We think this might be because of a loose tooth, a broken jaw (car accident), a ball of hairs or a dead eaten kitten in her system. We consult H. by phone and then try to put her in a bag with a zipper to take her to the vet (also owner of restaurant Vrozi in Votsalakia). But we do not succeed, and above that, we cannot find the vet nor get him on his cell phone. A few days later she looks a little bit better but very skinny. We think that there will be no little Spic & Span II for R. and D. to take to their house, alas. But there still is the black stray cat which comes to our house and is chased away by “our” Tabby. Perhaps they can take that one. We also decide - together with the para - to buy a real cage for cats, so it will be easier to transport a cat from A to B when necessary.

The syphon of the toilet does not function properly anymore so I do some research on the mechanism and after that I am able to repair it. Never too old to learn! From the frozen spinach of R. and D.’s new vegetable garden I bake one large and a dozen small spinakopita’s, spinach-and-feta pies in fyllo pastry.

July 2013

Neighbours R. and D. arrive for their three month summer stay and to celebrate the reunion we have dinner in Skouraiika at the tavern of mayor Kostas. It appears that for the weekend he invited a group of musicians who entertain us with their music from the table next to us. Satisfied but somewhat stiff from the ramshackle chairs we return home. Neighbours G. and D. return to Samos and we have dinner at R. and D.’s with my small spinach pies as amuses. The idea is born to compose a cookbook with all the successful recipes of the παρέα. I compose a first draft.

The μελτέμι, the strong summer wind, has arrived so the temperature becomes quite nice, also at night. We do however have to take the little cushions from the garden chairs into the house when not in use, otherwise we’ll have to pick them up somewhere down in the valley between the thistles ... The water from the pool evaporates relatively quickly due to the strong wind so we’ll have to fill it up. This and the surface of the water cooling because of the wind makes the water temperature drop from almost 30°C to a 26°C. That means a lot of fast swimming in the pool in order to keep myself warm.

Thursday it is time for the official control of the car. The office where it is supposed to take place is easy to find, so we arrive a bit early, but that gives us the opportunity to observe how things are dealt with. And to our astonishment it is a very efficiently run (privatized) company: two people at the reception for the intake and paperwork, a clean airconditioned waiting room, and four mechanics - we can see them working through large glass windows - who expertly check one car after another. Exactly as scheduled a car is driven inside and in no time we are outside with the official approval papers in our hands. Πω πω, they can work efficiently, those Greeks

We have lunch in Manolates and drop by at Nikita’s bookstore to talk about ordering extra copies of my flora, but he’d rather wait for my new edition, on which I already am working during the hottest hours of the day.

Fridays we have dinner at Kyriakos in Stella’s restaurant, where he put leg of lamb in the oven for our 25th wedding anniversary. Before, we have drinks at Mariaki’s, also to inform her that we have some work for her son, the plumber. Mariaki’s cat has kittens of one month old, and R. and D. get new hope for their plan of Spic and Span II. Saturday we have

souvlakis at the other taverna in Skouraiika, to divide business honestly between the two. The wind has left so during the days it is hot again but nights it is lovely. Sunday - so it appears - R. and D. are married for 35 years so we have dinner at their place. R. has made some very nice dishes so we decide to put them in our Pevkos cookbook as well.

Monday we have a farewell lunch with R. and E. in Mytilini and tuesdays we do a fotoshoot of neighbours G. and H. and their grandchildren in our pool. Tuesday night we end our (second) stay in Samos: we get into the plane to do some business in the NL for three weeks.

August 2013

After 3 weeks of genuine Dutch summer weather and meetings with a lot of friends we fly back to Samos from Düsseldorf, very early in the morning. We get into our car, do some shopping and collect the car insurance papers from the garage. Driving up to our house we encounter a pleasant surprise: the country road from Balos and the unpaved road near our house have been repaired so we arrive home quite smoothly. Neighbour R. has already opened the gate and started the cleaning robot in the pool. We unpack, rest and after that enjoy a dinner at R.'s and his wife D. There is a lot to chat up but nearing 11 o'clock sleep hits us so we drive back home and go to bed almost immediately. The next few days we take it easy and enjoy the surroundings, our house and the pool - which again does need several cleaning cycles. And there are some new odd jobs to do with the things we brought from the NL. Sunday afternoon we have lunch at the corner restaurant in Ormos, where we - in contrast to the reports from Balos - are the only customers. Sunday night Rodopi and her daughter and son in law pass by - husband Giannis is in Athens - with a lot of vegetables from their garden for us. After a lot of urging they agree to sit down and drink a glass of water on the terrace.

Monday August 5th is the commemoration of the Battle of Samos, which we are finally able to attend. I already called Effi from the Kalokairi Bar in Pythagorion to make a reservation for their terrace and for a room to spend the night - driving back so late in the evening seems not a good idea to us. We leave together with neighbours R. and D. They have arranged to meet with their friends W. and E. who have their sailing yacht moored in the harbour of Pythagorion. First we pass by E. and R. in Koumaradei to drop off some things for them (a.o. some of Rodopi's vegetables). It turns out to be a long pause because R. decides that a fresh bottle of ouzo has to be emptied (the driver of the car only drinking water!). Fortunately we are still able to find a place at the public parking in Pythagorion. We drop off R. and D. at their friends on the yacht and then go to our room for the night to put our things there. We have dinner at Ambrosia's and then turn to the Kalokairi Bar for frappé and a drink. When the performance in the harbour starts I am able to record it quite clearly from the front of the yacht of W. and E. After that there are really nice fireworks. We pay our bill at the Kalokairi Bar but after that join R., D., W. and E. in another bar which is R. and D.'s favourite. All things put together it still gets late.

The next (actually: the same ..) morning the alarm wakes us quite early since F. has to take the 7 o'clock plane to fly back to the NL to discuss the results of his medical tests at the hospital. I drop him off and turn back into bed; I do not hear the plane leave ... I have breakfast at the Kalokairi Bar with a very greasy croissant (not a good idea). I wish the sailors a safe voyage (to Fourni, Ikaria and Mykonos) and run some errands. The remainder of the day I rest at home. Wednesday F. calls me that the results of the tests are not favourable. He has to run two more tests which are to be done the next few days. I try to find something to do as I am reasonably shaken. The minute job of fitting the new data into our family trees on the computer keeps me occupied for 2 days. After that F. knows when the tests are taking place so I drive to hotel Princess Tia to book some new flights from and to the NL - the internet connection in our house is fairly bad more than half of the time. I also collect our packages from Maraki and buy a sewing machine on sale at Lidl's.

Neighbour L. drops by to thank us for taking care of "her" cat while she was away. Tabby is my true companion these days. A little gecko runs into the house when I open the door and does not want to leave anymore - oh well, an extra insect eater in the house won't harm.

I make a movie out of the video I shot on the Battle of Samos and post it on FaceBook. It turns out quite nice if I may say so. After that I test the new sewing machine. It works perfectly. The grumpy old man drops by to hand me a bag with the first fresh figs of the season. Yummie!

Saturday afternoon I get a call from neighbours R. and D.: they just arrived back with the ferry but their repaired car is not parked at the harbour, as the garage had promised ... So I drive over to pick them up. In the evening the three of us eat at the taverna of mayor Kostas in Skouraiika, together with neighbours L. and D. and their guests. There is no live music but there are a lot of Greeks having dinner there; they also have holidays. The Bulgarian lady, who married Thanassis' nephew, also is present. She is in the last month of her pregnancy, with 2 or 3 weeks their second child is due to be born.

Sundays I drop by R. and D. to install a wifi network in their house so they can call and text for free using the Viber app. We also make calls to try to get plumber Giorgos and carpenter Stamatis from Koumeika to come over to do some jobs around our house. Dimitris, the son of the plumber, and Stamatis drop by the next few days. Getting roof latches might give a problem since the wood has not stopped shrinking yet. Stamatis tells me all sorts of technical details about it, which I do not understand. We agree that I talk to F. about it and they will call him again. I contemplate on asking help of an English speaking Greek so we may get the details straight.

Neighbours R. and D. finally get their cats in their struggle against the rats. Not Maraki's little ones, for they do not let themselves get caught. Instead they adopt some asylum cats from Animal Care Samos, a nest of 4, which are christened Mili, Mythos, Nelson and Spider. They still are relatively small and need a lot of cuddling.

F. finishes his tests in the hospital so I pick him up at the airport. It is the hottest day of the year, no wind and 40 degrees C in the shade. The pool is the ideal place to cool down. In the evening, we celebrate his return with a nice meal at Themo's in Balos, together with R. and D, with lamb chops (me) and Greek meat balls (F). After that we have a look at the house party in the Blue Cave at the end of the beach at Balos, but it really is something for the youngsters. We meet Stamatis who used to work at Bella Vista's in Pevkos. He's in the army now, not to his satisfaction, but work is work We end the day in front of our house, admiring the stars.

Saturdays we have souvlakis at the other taverna in Skouraiika, and chat with the locals until closing time. Sunday Stamatis the carpenter drops by and we come to some sort of agreement about what he is going to make for the wooden cabin. He'll call us for the price.

The next Monday we get up early to catch the hydrofoil - here called Flying Dolphin - to Patmos. It builds up a nice speed so at a quarter past nine we get out in the harbour of Skala. The bus uphill, to the village Chora with the huge St. John's Monastery, leaves straight away so at a quarter to 10 we enter it. St. John the Apostle is supposed to have his revelations here at 95 AD (how old must he have been by then?). The monastery looks old but nice (it is founded in the 12th century) with lots of murals. In the museum there are some very old religious Christian manuscripts, some of the oldest in the world. The Purple Codex, of the 6th century, has been one of the sources for the New Testament.

After the monastery we have a nice cup of coffee on a terrace overlooking the island and the bay with the harbour. We walk around in the picturesque village surrounding the monastery and then take the bus down to the harbour where we lunch on a pizza and a pork chop. Skala itself is nothing special so we find ourselves a bank in the shade to wait for the boat back to Samos. That leaves with half an hour delay, at half past five. We race back to Samos, but after half an hour the boat slows down to its "normal" way of sailing, since during the day the wind has strengthened and the waves are too high for the hydrofoil system. Slowly we float back to Samos. A group of Bulgarians calls their hotel to inform them that they will be late for their evening entertainment. A Greek lady bursts into a fit of rage at the staff because she will miss her plane from Samos to Athens. The staff calls the airport to see what they can do. When the boat finally reaches the harbour of Pythagorion however they do not let her disembark before the other passengers, so it turns into a Greek mess with people pushing to get out and others trying to get hold of their suitcases somewhere in a big pile.

We get into our car at a quarter to eight, and after some shopping, arrive home at half past nine.

Tuesday we drive to Karlovassi for some business in which we succeed above all expectation. We also arrange to have the two paintings of F.'s father framed anew. At the end of the afternoon we drop by R. and D. to show the pictures of Patmos and to play with their kittens. Which in their turn turn wild on the cat's game on my iPad. Stamatis the carpenter calls with the price for the works and tells he will start next week.

Wednesday we have a jeep safari, together with E., along the coast down at Pagondas, from Tsopela almost up to Vergi. Tsopela really is nice but it is privately owned. Pavlou is messy. We drive back via Spatharei and Pyrgos (where E. inquires about her car in repair at the local garage) and have lunch at Koumaradei. Back home Dimitris from Giorgos the plumber calls that they will do the maintenance on the boiler next week.

Thursdays we go to hotel Princess Tia to chat up with H. over several coffees. In the evening it is the yearly celebration of Panagia (All Saints) of Pevkos. We chat with the locals and I promise Rodopi to bake apple pie for everybody at the celebration of St. John (Ag' Ioannis) on September 26th in "our" valley. Neighbour Evangelista tells that she tried a piece of the apple pie I baked for Rodopi some time ago and that she liked it very much. This year there is no barbecue at the end of the celebration because the next day there will be a feast at Skouraiika, so tells us mayor Kostas. That puts us in a dilemma since that is also the day of the 30th edition of the Onion Festival at Balos, for which we already booked a table.

So Fridays we drive to Balos. I already had a little dinner at home for onions are not my cup of tea. We pay the entrance fee and each get a beautifully decorated mug for the wine and a plate with food. I pick out the meat and give away the rest. The music is very nice, and the chummy mayor gives a speech. About that despite the crisis there always must be an opportunity to gather and celebrate. People dance, merry traditional row dances and also solo performances of old grooved men in a sort of melancholy rembetiko style. I contemplate that events like this tighten the bonds in these small communities, in spite of all the vile gossip that also exists. When the tombola is done (we won nothing), it is already way past midnight, so we skip going to Skouraiika. We listen to the music until it stops, and after giving a helping hand in clearing away the garbage we lie down in our bed very late.

We become aware that the end of the summer approaches. Once in a while there are little clouds around the mountain tops, and some nights are really nice and cool. During the day it remains hot however so every day I swim my lapses in pool.

Sunday neighbour R. cooks seafood spaghetti for us and his wife D., yummiel! Monday evening we notice that the public (rubber) water piping lying half under the public road nearby us has been damaged, probably overrun by a car. I call mayor Kostas who promises to fix it.

Tuesday morning we still have running water. F. takes an early shower for it is the day that plumber Giorgos will come to do maintenance on our solar boiler (decalcify it). He is just in the shower when the phone rings: Giorgos' son Dimitris tells us that they have a big job at a hotel and will not come today, but later. The public water supply is fixed later that morning; just to be sure I mark the spot with a bright orange plastic pylon so that it is not overrun again.

September 2013

The results of F.'s second round of tests enable us to combine our stay on Samos with the necessary treatment, so after a short stay in the NL we fly back to Samos, relieved by the relatively positive outcome of the tests.

However, we do not get a chance to relax since our electricity has been cut off. But Aris, as always, gives us the helping hand by making a direct connection between the solar park itself and our house. So we can plug in the refrigerator, the internet connection and the connectors for our phones into this "green" energy source. The swimming pool cleaning robot can also be put to work and a "cold" machine wash (luke warm water from the general water supply) is possible too. The first days we can even use the two table ventilators, after

that it gets less warm due to strong winds, so we don't need them anymore. Good luck we bought so many loose solar lamps, they come of good use now. We thank Aris by giving him the almost new Nokia cell phone of my mother's. However, it is Friday late afternoon so we abandon all hope to find a solution before the weekend sets in.

Why we are cut off becomes clear only next Tuesday. Mayor Kostas has been unable to help us out so we visit our lawyer in Karlovassi. He calls the DEH and then it shows that a paper is missing in our apply for elongation of the permission for the use of construction electricity: the declaration of the electrician who installed the electricity in our house when it was built (We already asked our lawyer and construction engineer Makris at the end of May to contact that man ...). Eventually, when this paper is produced, we are reconnected to the πρέμια in no time.

Meanwhile Stamatis has started on the roof of the wooden cabin. It is covered with plates and room for two shutters is sawn out. Next day help Andreas returns to cover the roof plats with a second layer of paint. And then nothing happens for a few days. We assume some of the further needed materials still haven't arrived. I can hardly understand Stamatis, probably because he has a very heavy accent. Giannis from Electronet on the contrary I can understand perfectly; he provides us with a better head for the satellite dish; HD-ready.

The first part of September is characterised by relatively cool temperatures, maximum 27 degrees in the shade. There is a strong wind and in the evening the temperature drops to 20 degrees; one evening I even put on a fleece jacket as I sit on the terrace, reading. During the day it is nice however, maximum of 27 degrees in the shade. But when I jump into the pool one day I find out that the water has really cooled down due to the cool nights and the strong winds: 25 degrees. I have to keep up a good speed at swimming to keep warm! I remember that for the last two years temperatures in September were way up higher, both in the air and in the water.

In the meanwhile I sow covers for two old cushions; they are for the houses of the four little cats at R. and D.'s so that they will be warm during the winter. "Our" Tabby, now two years old, is eating himself into a thick layer of fat around his body - he will survive the winter like that.

After about a week the wind gets down and it gets warmer again, so the water in the pool rises to a nice temperature again. Sundays the whole of the παρέα drives to Kerveli to listen to the music and dance. We end up at Pythagorion and after a nice ice cream drive back home late.

Mondays the Swiss neighbours arrive so that gives us a good reason to have dinner at Themo's in Balos. C. and I again indulge in a plate of delicious lamp chops. On the way back we pick up a bag of chops and ribs from a pig Aris slaughtered.

Tuesdays I drop off F. at the airport for the last round of visits to the doctors at the hospital. Afterwards I go shopping and drop by at E. and R.'s at Koumaradei. E. is at work, doing a sightseeing tour with passengers from the big cruise ship Costa Mediteranea, which is moored at the harbour in Vathi. It is a brother of the Costa Concordia which capsized near Italy. Back home I clear away the groceries.

Wednesday keeps me occupied with the preparations for the first Annual Petanque Tournament of Pevkos/Skouraiika, which will be held on the field up at the back of our house the next day, with a buffet afterwards. Thursdays it is supposed to start at 17.00h, but it is still so hot that most people opt for a drink at or in our pool first. A nice view! Only at half past six everybody moves to the field, where the game is seriously played, right from the beginning. G. volunteers as umpire/referee, but cannot prevent the ladies' and the gents' teams getting equal scores. It is getting dark when there is a wish for a last game to get a winner, and then the ladies' teams wins beyond any doubt. Satisfied or somewhat disappointed everybody picks up some things and walks back to the house. There it is concluded that it was a successful event and that it should be repeated at least once a year.

The next day I clean everything but it is not much work since everybody already helped out the evening before (doing the dishes etc.). I need not cook since there is enough food left. Stamatis drips by to finish the roof of the wooden cabin, since rain is predicted for next week. When he is finished it shows again how difficult it is to communicate in Greek: he has

made us some beautiful perspex windows in the roof and to be sure that no rain will leak in he has taped them very thoroughly. There is no way they can be opened! Somewhat bewildered I pay him and still have the presence of mind to ask him how we will continue with the pergola at the petanque field. He calls a friend who can do that, and so Panagiotis drops by on his moped later that afternoon. We discuss the design - with the sketch on the iPad at hand. Galvanized iron poles are the best option in this climate. He promises to call me next week.

But still, the story of the wooden cabin as an observatory has not ended yet

F. calls and tells me that further treatment will only start in January, so we can continue with our plans for the rest of this year as scheduled. I have another swim, before it gets too cold. The weather forecast has changed from 5 days of rain to only 2, but the temperature will drop to 26°C, which is quite normal for the second half of September.

Saturday we have dinner at Stella's/Kyriakos' Cypriot restaurant in Balos. Sunday morning we have coffee at Tia's, where H. will be lowered into the swimming pool accompanied by music from Hague H. and his band. But Hague H. does only show up after H. is already helped out of the water after an hour of aqua therapy. We have lunch at Esperos and then it is a Lazy Sunday Afternoon.

Mondays a large cormorant decides to come and have a look at the contents of our pool. It is not shy so I can take some really good pictures. When it has concluded that there are no fish in our pond, it flies away after some 15 minutes. In the afternoon I quickly take a swim and then bring all the cushions from the garden chairs inside, for the rain is under its way. As is a thunderstorm. But it is really nothing, the flagstones just get wet and later that evening I see some distant lightning far beyond Ikaria, accompanied by some faint thunder.

Tuesday when I drive to the airport to pick up F. I see some rain clouds hanging around the peak of the Ampelos, it is said that the north side of the island had a good shower the night before.

One day we drive to "Brighton-Samos"/"Coney Island-Samos"(the little seaside resort Votsalakia) to listen to a concert of Hague H. and his band. The weather stays good so F. and I start the second half of September in some sort of Indian Summer. The pool water still has a reasonable temperature so when our Swiss neighbours C., R. and D. show up for a game of petanque, we are able to take a picture from them in our pool first. The Ladies Team wins again, btw

Via notary Maria we arrange a power of attorney for her brother Giorgos Papakonstantinou, so he can take care of our tax matters once and for all.

Saturdays we have another bite at the two tavernas in Skouraiika, equally dividing our expenses between them.

Sundays and Mondays we take it easy, only cleaning the house a little bit, for the next day our old friends T. and H. will visit us with their Toyota Cruiser, on which they built a tent. They have travelled as far as the Moroccan Sahara with it, but this year Greece is on. We pick them up early in the morning in the harbour of Karlovassi and it's a hearty reunion. They park their car at our premises near the house, put up the tent and plug in their refrigerator.

The next few days we make several trips (I find a new flowering plant on the top of the Karvounis) and enjoy the delicacies of the local restaurants. The weather stays perfect so we sit on the terrace at night, and revive memories of the good old days in Africa.

Our Flemish neighbours gradually leave. When T. and H. and our Swiss neighbours too have left, it gets sort of quiet around us. We drop by H. in Balos to bring her a plate of couscous, as a change for all the Greek food.

The end of the month approaches and so does our trip to Southern Italy. When I take out the papers, I see to my horror that I made a typo in the number of the license plate of our car. However I can put that right with a telephone call to the booking office. And from the internet we learn that the travel agency of our guided week in Istanbul, at the end of October, has gone bankrupt. But eventually we get a message that it is taken over and we will be able to make that tour.

Relieved, we enjoy the last day of September. I have a last swim before the autumn rains come and in the bay in front of our house the dolphins drop by. We take the garden chairs inside and leave for Magna Graecia.

October 2013

TUESDAY OCTOBER 1ST 2013

We are awakened by the sound of raindrops quietly tinkling on the roof. When we look on the internet, we see a major rainshower approaching, which urges us to put the remainders of the garden furniture inside already. We pack our suitcases and spread out cloths on the floor on the usual spots to absorb the water from our still leaking roof - autumn has definitely arrived.

We shower and leave, just after which neighbours D. and L. drop by to invite us for dinner at Stella's, tomorrow, which we have to decline of course. We have a drink at neighbours K. and J. to say goodbye to them - we sit on their terrace since the sun has returned.

We arrive in Karlovassi way before embarkment time so we have ourselves some cappuccinos to pass time. We collect our tickets in the office and find out that even in October there are ferries to Thessaloniki - every Sunday morning from Vathi at 7.00 pm. We are in the front of the queue for the ferry but even so it turns out that we are one of the last to get aboard. This is partly due to the fact that there are large puddles on the quay and also on the iron accesses to the car decks - which makes the wheels of the big lorries slip and slide and only with the aid of big heaps of sawdust they are eventually able to get aboard. And partly because as always it is a really Greek mess of who should go aboard first. F. gets out with the hand luggage; now he still can get out of the car on his side. To my immense relief I don't have to go in backwards, that is only for the cars disembarking at Fourni, the first stop en route. A man who is bound for Piraeus accidentally also wants to drive in backwards, is scolded in a very loud voice by the ferrymen (Πω, πω!). I park the car rather smoothly, but when I get out the ferrymen are shouting at me for no apparent reason, it seems. I get it that I have to hurry (late! slippery lorries!), no, not by the emergency exit! but back to the passenger entry, and then a man points at my picnic cooler and says "No refrigerator!" When I answer: "Food" it seems to be okay. So I arrive at the balcony deck still somewhat agitated, but the nice view at the north-west corner of Samos when we sail calms me down pretty soon. We plan to have a nice drink in the bar, but they only sell beer or strong liquor, so we wait till the self-service counter opens and then have some wine in the brightly lit cafeteria, after a snack from our cooler.

F. gets out to have a look when we moor at Fourni and Ikaria; we get to bed not too late.

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 2ND 2013

We get up well rested - in spite of the hard beds and have breakfast with the remainders from the cooler. When I go to have a look at the car deck, I see that the cars are so tightly parked that there is no way I can get into our car. F. takes the hand luggage and decides to leave the ferry on foot; I'll just have to wait until the surrounding cars have left and then probably will be urged by shouting ferrymen to leave the deck at top speed While waiting I lean on a ramp and do not notice that my hands get covered by a layer of grease... But luckily a nice English-speaking man helps me to wriggle the car out of the mess. F. gets in and we turn on the gps for the next stretch to the harbour of Patras. The heavy traffic in Piraeus demands all of our attention but after a short while we smoothly continue our way on the highway to Corinth. Past Corinth the highway stops and we are back on that same 3-lane road which is still as s#!\$#! as four years ago. Which has turned into a tollway too, by the way. So we drive half across the shoulder of the road to let maniacs including bus and lorry drivers have their way to overtake us at very high speed. Actually, the road is

even worse than 4 years ago, for now everywhere there are road works going on making it into a real highway.

As a contrast, they now do have road restaurants, so we are able to stop and have some cappuccino. I am relieved I have been able to get a good night's rest, as four years ago I had spent the night in a broken airseat and almost fell asleep behind the wheel the next morning... The landscape here in the north of the Peloponnese is nice though, as is the new bridge from Rio to Antirio.

We reach Patras in good time. The address of the ticket office which I had found on the internet, is in the old port, and not in the new one as our neighbour R. had told us. But as it turns out we are wrong, we do have to go to the New Port. R. had also told us that there would be clear signs to show the way to it, but that also turns out to be wrong. We do not find signs to "New Port", so we decide to follow "South Port" which is indicated only by two small signs on the whole stretch. That turns out to be the right place, but since this port is brand new there are no signs as where to get your tickets or where to park for the ferry to Bari. Eventually we find it all, and spend some of ours drinking coffee and internetting in a cafeteria, since spending the hours on a hot sunlit quay does not appeal to us. At 4 o'clock we drive on to the ferry; F. has to get aboard on foot again. I get a nice spot for the car where I can even open all the doors and can drive straight out tomorrow.

There are not many passengers on the ferry, we leave at 6 o'clock sharp. When, after sailing for an hour, I enquire whether we can upgrade from our air seats to a cabin (neighbour G. tipped us that you can get a reductio like this) I am told that I will have to wait after the ferry has left Igoumenitsa (around midnight). We have a bite and a drink and talk to a Dutch lorry driver. After we sail from Igoumenitsa (2 o'clock already) we are told that there are no more cabins available. So we get ourselves as comfortable as is possible on a row of air seats, trying to ignore the snorers and a bunch of praying Russian babushkas on pilgrimage.

THURSDAY OCTOBER 3RD 2013

We have been able to get some sleep and quietly have breakfast with a cuppa and some improvised left overs on a sandwich from our cooler. We arrive in the port with one hour delay, it is past 11 when we enter the busy motorway surrounding Bari. The traffic is heavy with small turnoffs and entrances where rows of cars steer into the main road without any compassion for their fellow drivers. After some bustle with our gps we get on to quiet country roads and have our first stop at the archeological site of Metaponto, to which Pythagoras fled after the local authorities of the 160 km distant Crotona had concluded that he'd been getting far too much influence over there ... (he had fled Samos before after a likewise situation). Pythagoras died in Metaponto but his grave has gone lost after the Romans had left the village. We are the only visitors and walk around the site where there is still a lot of restoring going on. The little museum downtown has a nice collection of artefacts. Policoro is the next stop; next to the site there is also a museum in which we look around.

Then we turn to our bed & breakfast for the night. We leave the coastline (the arch in the foot of Italy's boot) and head north. After a while we find out that we had better enter the coordinates of our destination in the gps since we cannot find it in the village (the street has no name). Eventually we arrive at a beautifully located mansion. At half past 8 we, some German house guests, the owner and his mama are served a local meal - with a pasta course indeed - which is served by the maid. We end the meal with fresh fruit from the garden and a small glass of grappa. After that we do some iPadding and go to sleep early.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 4TH 2013

We leave, well rested, at 10 past 9 in the direction of Crotona. This is situated in the toe of Italy's boot, on the ball of the foot so to say. In kms it is not much, but the narrow two lane road takes us through small seaside resorts where we sometimes

only can go at a low pace. The landscape is nice, some sort of low dunes with some vegetation and a broad empty beach with white foaming waves in a green-blue sea. We arrive at Crotona around midday, but then the gps abandons us completely. Cannot find the address, no entry-roads, one way-roads from the wrong side etc. After some inquiries a young lady is so nice as to drive in front of us to the museum. The collection really is beautiful, with the broad gold head diadem of Hera as a highlight.

Then it is high time to drive to our next hotel in Ascea under Naples. Quite a stretch (350 kms) but we enjoy the green mountainous landscape through which we drive. In the twilight we see the distant bay of Naples and drive on to a coastal way which is carved out into the mountains lying near to the coast. The the gps abandons us again. unclear road turnoffs, non-existing sideways, walking area-only-s, dead-end streets, etc. We drive around in the dark until we get at a road block, 11 minutes from our destination according to the gps. Then we pull over at an Albergo where we ask for help. A German group of tourists helps us out, one of the women is fluent in Italian and explains the situation to the hotel owner which I call. After some persuasion the man promises to pick us up. In the meanwhile the chief of the Albergo makes us something to eat: braised fresh anchovies stuffed with ricotta cheese. The German lady has her namesday today (Francesca, after San Francesco of Assisi, the animal lover, and it is Animal Day today!) so she gets a big cake from the chief. We also get a piece of it and according to good German tradition we all stand up and sing a song. The hotel owner picks us up a littel after 10 and after a ride of an hour and a quarter - back onto the coastal road south, then some highway up north, and then another coastal road back to the south - we arrive at Ascea where we will stay the next five nights. We get into bed at midnight, dead tired.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 5TH 2013

We drive to the nearby excavations of the ancient Greek city of Elea, where we have a quiet look around. Amongst the Greek philosophers who settled here at the 5th century BC (the Eleatic School) also was Melissus from Samos. This philosophical school was characterised by its belief in the permanent, invariable state of all material. Democritus idea of atoms as building blocks later came forth from this point of view. Aristotle did not agree with this concept by the way, he favoured the theory of "panta rei"; "everything flows" literally, the variability of everything so to say. So even then you could put together scientist (in a figurative way) who would immediately start to disagree with one another. The Eleatic School also "reasoned" that besides the four elements (earth, water, air, fire), there was a 5th one: ether. This idea took hold for about 2 millennia, deep into the 18th century. Even in our days, we still know the word in "ethereal" meaning "like in heaven".

On the site of the old city the old city gate and the small theatre are nicely restored; and a start has been made on a house with frescoed walls. There are a lot of small lizards crawling around so I am able to take some nice pictures of them. In the sanctuary of Aesklepios (the patron of the doctors) a lone lily stands in solitude beauty.

When it starts to rain around midday we return to the hotel. When we get outside to grab some lunch, the rain has turned into a shower. On the boulevard everything is dead quiet, most joints have closed down for the winter (or the rain?). In a shopping mall we find a cafeteria where we have some sandwiches and beer; when we walk back to the hotel it really pours down on us. We dry our clothes and do some reading. In the evening we are still filled from the big sandwiches so we have some final leftover from the cooler and do some more reading and iPadding before we go to sleep. Not that we have much choices in this little town in hibernation ...

SUNDAY OCTOBER 6TH 2013

It thunders and rains when we get up. In the kitchen behind the breakfast room we here the staff clearing out the water which has poured in.

Arms locked together we crouch under the little umbrella from our car and walk to the nearby railway station. There we find out that we can get tickets from the cafeteria on the side and not from the vending machine - that's only for long distance Intercity rides. A young man kindly shows us the right quay from where the train will depart. Half an hour in the slow train brings us to the little railway station of Paestum, Posidinio in ancient Magna Graecia. It has gotten dry again and together with some other Sunday daytrippers we walk on to the excavation site. Which is rather large, so we spend quite some time - evading the big puddles - to admire the Dorian temples of Athina and Hera. The nearby museum exhibits some beautiful artefacts like the big black-on-red pottery vase showing Europe being abducted by Zeus disguised as a huge white bull. This vase was stolen the moment it was found (1968) and only recently been given back from the Getty Museum in California where it had miraculously surfaced ... Also the frescoed stone tombs are beautiful, especially the one with the diver on (the inside of) its lid.

As a good Italian tradition we have an elaborate Sunday lunch in a restaurant where - for the first time - the staff speaks appropriate English. After which we train back to Ascea and spend the evening like before.

MONDAY OCTOBER 7TH 2013

We have finished the Magna Graecia part of our journey and now turn to the Imperium Romanum. At 8 o'clock we get the train to Pompeii where we arrive two hours later - train fare being only 15 euros return. The punctuality of the trains however is comparable to the NL: we arrive with a good delay.

Around 11 we enter the site, the weather having turned sunny again. We look around the vast area and take a lot of pictures. Especially the Thermae of Sabbiano with its richly decorated polychrome ceilings are of exceptional beauty. As are the Forum Thermae with its rows of atlants "carrying" the ceiling. The bordello is quite revealing in its frescos as it comes to the possibilities offered. We are impressed by the (almost complete) remains of the petrified inhabitants which perished at 79 AD. Luckily they were already dead by the toxic fumes before the ashes and pumic stones engulfed the little town.

We have a bite and a drink and at half past 2 we leave the site past the vast amphitheatre. We treat ourselves to an ice cream at the railway station.

After we get back at Ascea we buy some regional delicacies at the local shops of which we compose our evening meal.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 8TH 2013

Today Herculaneum and the Archeological Museum of Naples are on our list. Again we take the 8 o'clock train. When we have passed Pompeii we notice the Vesuvius, its summit obscured by thick clouds and it starts to rain again. When we get out at the little railway station of Ercolano, as it is nowadays called, next to the little harbour, it is dry again. iPhone with map in the hand we walk to the address of the entrance gate of the site. But then it shows that the entrance is not at no. 6, mr. Wikipedia!!!, but at no. 189, another km down the road.

We walk around this excavation, which is smaller than Pompeii, but nevertheless better conserved, due to the lava flows which locked it from the outside world (complete inner and outer walls, petrified and/or charred wooden frames, parts of second floors). You really get the idea of walking in an ancient town. In several houses complete frescoed rooms and tiled floors with mosaics are still intact.

At 1 o'clock we walk back to the railway station to catch the train to Naples. Which turns out to be a hazardous task. At first, at the railway station of Ercolano, some youngsters stare at our backpack with greedy eyes. Then, after another view of the

Vesuvius with another grey cloud at its top, we find it very difficult to find the underground line to the museum at Naples Central. Directions are scarce and obscure. Eventually we learn that the metro is just such a train as the “normal” Trenitalia ones, and they depart from the same quays as the regional trains, in between. An elder man is so kind as to help us out. As we get out, he shows us the way to the museum entrance, which is a long walk through tunnels, just like the Place de la Concorde in Paris. But here again, there are no signs whatsoever as to guide the tourists. Without the helpful man we would have never found it. We thank him profoundly and turn to the museum. Which is closed!!

I swear whole-heartedly and then we go quench our anger and thirst in a little bar across the museum. There I meet a Dutch teacher with 5 of his pupils on a school trip. He, too, is utterly perplexed that the museum is closed. He assures me that this is not the “normal” weekly closing day.

We take the underground back to Naples Central Station (which is sometimes only called Piazza Garibaldi, as to increase the confusion), but we let the first train pass as it is crowded to the brim and we don't fancy another attempt at pickpocketing ... The next one is not crowded and after relatively little searching we sit down in “our” train back to Ascea. This time we ride past the backside of the Vesuvius, so we can observe this innocent looking but treacherous volcano - only 1251 m high - in the light of the setting sun.

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 9TH 2013

We drive away from the hotel at 8 o'clock. Wiser than before, we combine the driving directions of our gps and that of Apple Maps on the iPhone. After one hour and a half on busy country roads we turn on to the freeway up north, with a last glimpse of the Vesuvius, as always with a cloud around its top. Due to the driving directions on both appliances we have a uneventful journey, not even a traffic jam on the highway around Bologna in the rush hour. At half past 6 we stop at the parking area of our hotel in Monselice, just south of Venice, after 800 kms.

THURSDAY OCTOBER 10TH 2013

We get the train to Venice. There we buy a city plan and walk into the old city centre. It is really beautiful, we stare our eyes out. When we enter the San Marco square, my mouth falls open in astonishment. I knew it was nice but I had not expected the many historical buildings would be so richly decorated! Like the entrance gate with clockwork and Zodiac covered in gold leaf, the church with Moorish inlays and decorations between the biblical fresco's, and the Doge's Palace with a different bas-relief on every pillar. Behind it I perceive the Bridge of Sighs, small but nevertheless also impressive. I hear a Dutch tour guide telling her group that they are lucky today since the square is dry; on many days the water of the lagoon covers it. This place really makes up for the long drive that took us here!

We slowly walk back and have a tasty lunch at a Chinese restaurant. A nice change from weeks and weeks of souvlaki, tzatziki, pasta and pizza. Variety is the spice of life.

After that we buy a set of vases of Venetian glass on discount, and a Christmas tree angel. I treat myself to a necklace and matching earrings handmade of Murano (Venetian) glass beads, and a Christmas/birthday present for my friend S. Satisfied after such a fulfilling day we train back to Monselice.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 11TH 2013

After beautiful Venice we decide to skip (Padua and) Florence and its Dan Browne Inferno tours, also because we heard that parking garages at the edge of the town are outrageously expensive. We take it easy and slowly drive to our last hotel in Assisi, about 150 km from the port of Ancona. We don't take the (toll) freeway but 4-lane

country roads which lead us through a landscape of tree covered hills/mountains. The tarmac sometimes is terrible but that does not bother us very much.

Early in the afternoon we arrive in Assisi, where the patron saint of the animals is honoured with a huge monastery with ultra modern underground parking garage, cut out in the rocky surface of the hill on which the monastery stands. To handle the pilgrims, since the place is swarmed with them.

We have a rest and then dine in our hotel, watching the WC qualifications on tv and on the internet.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 12TH 2013

We leave early to be sure to catch the ferry on time, beware of mishaps. The way first leads us to winding tree lined mountain roads, where a big fat hare sits on the middle of the road, eyeing us curiously. After that we follow a 4 lane road to Ancona, still amidst the mountain slopes.

After a breakfast in a road restaurant we arrive at the ferry's booking office in due time. We immediately upgrade our passage from the air seats to a cabin, to avoid disappointments like last time. We get aboard early and find ourselves a place in the back lounge near the window, where we spend time reading and watching the rain fall until we sail.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 13TH 2013

We breakfast at leisure and after the ferry has left Igoumenitsa we sail on under a warm sun. At 3 o'clock we disembark, this time in the Old Port of Patras for a change.

After the distressing 3 lane road to Corinth we turn in the direction of Nafplio and find ourselves on a brand new highway to Kalamata in the deep South of the Peloponnessos. We wonder why the highway from Corinth to Patras hasn't been given priority instead of this super road to the far less significant Kalamata

At 6 o'clock we arrive at Nafplio, where there is a cosy Sunday afternoon atmosphere at a lovely temperature. We sit outside on a terrace until late in the evening.

MONDAY OCTOBER 14TH 2013

We sleep out and breakfast outside in the beginning of another warm sunny day. There still are many tourists in this now mundane little town of mixed Greek and Venetian character. The students of the Art Academy, here since 2003, who crowded the terraces last night, either are not yet awake or are at their Academy.

We have some coffee and later on have a look in the little museum with artefacts from the surrounding Mykene, Tiryns and Epidauros. Although the major items are in the National Museum in Athens, like the golden death mask found in the circular graves of Mykene ...

We do not see Lex and Max (our king and queen) who probably are not at their country estate some 80 kms from here. At 2 o'clock we move on and find our ferry boat at Piraeus after only a short search. I contemplate that it really must be easy to make a series of digital information boards over the 7 km long highway to the port to inform passengers on the quay, the destination/island and the name of the ferry boat ... So that everyone may find its way without harassment ... Tourism still is the major income source of the country. And lorry drivers will be relieved to be rid of all those hesitating tourist drivers

We sail to Samos under a warm and sunny blue sky. The next morning we disembark and drive home, with 2600 kms behind the wheels of our car.

We are soon at home again in our house. When we go shopping at the Lidl's, we first drive to the parking area of Vathi, where there is a huge container for pet-bottles, cans and glassware. But to our astonishment it has completely disappeared. Finished, a man tells us when he sees our gaze. It died of success after 2 years, we think, it was

always stuck. So reluctantly we dispose of this waste together with the “normal” things.

After a few days of fast food while travelling I get this enormous urge to do some real cooking. I try out some new recipes that have come to my mind, to the satisfaction of F. and me. We also greatly enjoy our own beds, after weeks in hard and/or uncomfortable ones. The first day is sunny so we sit outside a lot. I run two cycles in the laundromat, for rain is predicted the coming days. The next day we visit H. in Balos to wish her a good journey back home. On the way we see a big school of dolphins in the bay below us jumping and tumbling in the water, as to say: Welcome back! Tabby, our self-adopted cat, drops by the first evening we are back; R. and D.’s cats only show up after a day or so.

We get some rain showers for several days, good opportunity to sort out all the pictures and get our paperwork back in order. And good for the plants too!

Saturday is a bright sunny day again. In the afternoon I weed the vegetable garden and try to get rid of those darned daisies with roots and all since the earth now is soft. I succeed with the not-too-big ones; the roots of the bigger ones go in deep and do break off half-way. But hopefully I definitely removed quite a few. After another awesome sunset it cools down quickly.

The last days of our stay on Samos the weather stays nice and sunny. We chat up with C. and M., the brother and sister in law of our neighbours R. and D., who have come over for some business matters. I make chutney out of the last (ripe and unripe) melons and F. puts an extra winter paint coating on the wooden cabin.

After we watered the plants for one extra time (no rain predicted for the coming week) and fed Tabby the leftovers to survive winter, we put all the garden furniture inside and close the house. After a week in Konstaninópolis we will return to the Netherlands to see how things are going up there.