

DREAMHOUSE IN GREECE 7 - 2014

January 2014

We had planned to take our kitchen apart in the NL in the days before January and therefore decided to spend Christmas on Samos. The kitchen plans are postponed but since the tickets were already booked we fly to Samos a couple of days before the end of the year for a short winter holiday. And since F. had gotten it into his head that we should have a Christmas tree over there we carry an extra suitcase filled to the brim with the detachable parts of a somewhat bigger (and heavier!) than expected second hand Christmas tree bought at marktplaats.nl. Just after we had promised ourselves not to drag so much along with us to Samos ever again.

That Thursday we first visit the new Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam in the afternoon and have a meal at the Vietnamese restaurant in the Leidsestraat where we had dinner last time we were there. We spend a pleasant night at Schiphol watching reruns of some tv programs on the iPad and arrive at our departure gate Friday morning at 6 o'clock. But then our luck turns. Transavia changes planes twice due to technical failures and at half past 8 we are informed that we will not leave before 11 o'clock. That implies that we will never be able to catch our connecting flight. I call Olympic Air to reschedule our flight to Samos to the next morning. Of course all the cheap tickets on that flight are long gone ...

We arrive at Athens Airport at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, dead tired. We grab a toothbrush and - paste at the local drugstore and are picked up for a hotel not too far from the airport. We take a short rest and then walk to a nearby taverna for some dinner. We fall into the bed at 8 o'clock in the evening and sleep steadily till 6 o'clock the next morning.

The hotel owner drives us to the airport again and after a smooth flight we find ourselves standing next to our car at the parking of Samos Airport, in a nice Saturday morning sun. We drive to the Cash & Carry's and the Lidl's for 2 weeks groceries; arriving home about 11 o'clock. The temperature is quite nice so we quickly take everything inside and open the shutters and the windows to let the sun shine in. We enjoy the weather on the terrace and all the stress of the trip evaporates. Thanassis drives past and gives us a warm welcome; he paid the electricity bill - no more automatic payments once you have been cut off, we assume.

Later on the wind gets a bit chilly so we start clearing up things inside the house. Blackie drops by for some food. He now is very large and has a thick angora fur (he is not a pregnant she, we determine as we peek under his tail). We turn on the hot air stoves to get the dampness and the chill out of the house. We prepare a simple meal, watch some tv and catch up on our sleeping again.

The next morning, Sunday, we are woken by some distant gun shots and dog barking from hunters. When I open the door Tabby reports for duty. He hasn't lost an ounce since we last saw him. At 9 o'clock the temperature already is really nice in the sunshine. After breakfast I vacuum clean the house and then leave for a photography tour of the plants in the surroundings. At C. & R.'s the first anemones have already started to flower. F. puts up the Christmas tree in the meantime. There is no time to finish it because in the afternoon we drive to H.'s in Balos to catch up on the latest gossip. She tells us that Maraka has gotten an assistant while recovering from her broken knee. The first one was supposed to open the taverna in the afternoon but that somehow never happened. The second one was even worse:

an elder woman (from Albanai? Bulgaria?) who instead of opening the taverna in the afternoon got involved in a „romantic” relationship with one of the regulars from the taverna....Fired too.

The next day, Monday, we first drive to Thanassis for the electricity bill. But of course he is not home and of course Roula does not know where the bill is. We drive on to Karlovassi, where there is a note at the door of our lawyer’s office that he is absent during Christmas brake untill the 4th of January. And I called him two weeks ago when we agreed that we would drop by this Monday We drive on to our garage in Kampos Vourliotes where the owner patiently explains to us (again) that we have to take the already printed bill for the car to the post office in order to pay the road tax. We drive to the post office in Kokkari but there they only deal with the locals. We also drop by at the pharmacist’s where his Dutch wife gives us the phone number of a Dutch MD who might help F. next summer with a shot so that he doesn’t have to fly back to the NL only for that matter. Just before closing time we arrive at the post office in the capital Vathi where we are able to pay the road tax, single amount and not double like last year when we were too late. Notwithstanding the trouble of finding a parking place since the large public parking area at the harbour is closed due to renovation. (Btw when we get back to the NL two weeks later we find a letter of our lawyer with a photocopy of the receipt for the road tax, that he paid too

Back home F. finished the Christmas tree in the sparkling sunlight, after which we shoot a traditional Christmas picture to send to all our friends by e-mail, later when the sun has set and it starts getting cold. I also take a picture when it is dark, with the lights turned on in the Christmas tree.

The next day is cloudy so time for odd jobs in and around the house. I study the rsoette formed by the leaves from the orchid under the olive tree near our bedroom, and count some 26 similar ones on our yard, some in places where I am sure there has not been an orchid within 10 metres last year. Seed being spread by the wind?

After that I fill some buckets with the gravel and sand which is left behind from the construction of the stone pillars from our entrance gate last year. To spread out on the path I intend to make behind the wooden cabin. The filled buckets however are very heavy and of course our hand truck has flat tyres again. so I drive up the car and load them into it, to unload them on the terrace where F. drags them under the canopy at the swimming pool (rain is expected). I sart on the first stretch of the path, for now you do not have to be on your guard for snakes nor scorpions (hybernating deep in the ground).

In the meanwhile I also busy myself with some traditional, old-fashioned Dutch recipes for the nearing holidays: custard pudding and beef stock for the beef balls which I want to make New Year’s Eve.

Christmas mornings starts with shining sunlight and little wind, so we enjoy breakfast and later on coffee leisurely at the terrace. After that I continue to work on the path behind the wooden cabin. After lunch the weather still is nice so I keep on working outside. Before I cook Christmas dinner I make a thick ragout out of the beef and the stock and cool it in the fridge.

Boxing Day also starts sunny so I keep on weeding on the path. The grumpy old man passes by and hands us oranges and tangerines. When he asks us if we want some chorta I politely answer that we still have some vegetables but that we would like a little bit - in fact we don’t like this bitter tasting greens.

In the afternoon it really gets cloudy so I put on my coat and make another tour - in the opposite direction - looking for flowering plants. I do not find flowering orchids - it seems that there already is one species flowering in the utter south east corner of the island I learned from a FaceBook page on Samos nature. But I do notice that in the little meadow near the old olive tree where i found the Samos orchid last year, there are many orchid rosettes coming up, at least four different species to judge by the shape of their leaves. On the way back I find a bush of flowering clematis.

Back home I dig into the messy job of covering balls of thick ragout with egg and breadcrumbs to form them into „bitterballen” to be deep-fried and eaten steaming hot. After an hour this job is done and after I clean myself I can put 25 ready balls into the freezer. Then suddenly it starts to rain so we rush to take inside the cushions from the garden chairs. I also call Thanassis to persuade him to give the electricity bill to Roula so we can pick it up tomorrow in case he is not at home.

The nice weather is over for a while. During the night the wind gets stronger so we take the fragile Christmas decorations out of the tree. „Third” Christmas Day we rise to see a fuming sea and threatening black clouds, also a nice view. It is not in the least cold, some 16°C. We drop by at Roula’s, who at first does not know anything about the electricity bill. But after some pushing and telephone calls she is able to find it in a heap of paperwork, together with two Vodafone bills for the internet (which still are paid automatically, luckily). The electricity bill still hasn’t been paid, we see, it was due a month ago.

In Karlovassi we first stop at Maria’s to arrange that she has our hair cut at the end of the morning. Then we go to the bank where it is very crowded, like last Monday. There are a 100 numbers before us ... We sit down and watch the crowd. It looks like people are settling a lot of payments; probably because they postponed them to the last days of the year ... After an hour and a quarter we are helped and are able to start the automatic payment of the revma (electricity) again. This bill however we still must pay cash, at the post office and not anywhere else since we are late with the payment. So it is already half past 1 when we get back to Maria’s for our haircut.

We drive back home in the rain, via Koumeika. Maraki’s taverna still looks very much closed, but the old house next to it across the plateia is being renovated. Story goes that it will be turned into a taverna too

In the meanwhile we have learned by e-mail that we are going to get Flemish neighbours on the piece of land behind us, next to the solar panels. They are two couples, K. & J. and S. & C., who are friends of C. & M.’s, the owners of Bella Vista II in Blankenberge and the sister and brother-in-law of our neighbours R. & D. The men of the couples are said to have played Greek music last summer in the Belgian Bella Vista and may come to play in the Greek Bella Vista next summer. So far we haven’t noticed any activity in that area, so we wait and see (Θα δούμε as they say in Greek). When I have a better look a few days later I see that a beginning has been made with a path and levelling the ground. But still an enormous amount of soil will have to be shifted to make room for a double house with swimming pools and car parks ...

That night it starts to rain heavily. At the end of the night it shows that our roof still leaks, so we pull away the dining table and the small armchairs and spread out cloths to absorb the water ... After which we get back into bed to get warm again .. Saturday it keeps raining, although not as heavy as before, so we stay inside.

Sunday morning we are woken by the sun peeking over the rim of the hills and after breakfast we pack our hiking shoes, the big telelens and tripod and camera and drive to the flamingo lake near Psili Ammos. The flamingos stately wade through the water to be photographed, although the sun is not exactly in a good spot. After that we take a country road to Posidonio where this *Ophrys sitiaca* should be in flower. We do not find it however, but do find a *Narcissus tazetta* and an unknown small purple flower.

For lunch we drive to the nearby Kervelli, for I suddenly remember that Judith and Franz of the „double monarchy” told us some time ago that the taverna there will stay open on Sundays during the winter. That is so, and we are welcomed heartedly. There are even some music instruments put up, but today there is no show. We enjoy our lunch but I make a „note to myself” not to order the house wine anymore. It does not taste nice and we notice that they also have regular *retsina* and *Fokianos rosé*. We drive back home to enjoy the last rays of the sunshine on the terrace.

Monday is sunny but windy so ideal for some gardening work. I weed the vegetable garden thoroughly and hope that in April when we get back we do not have too much work before we can start seeding I also plaster a hole in the canopy where last year the big fake wasps had made a nest. F. puts an extra layer of paint on the entrance gate.

The day of New Year’s Eve starts as another sunshiny day so I start the attack on the sprouting dandelions and thistles. First around the swimming pool, and I also cut back a large part of the maliciously thorny caper bush next to the hot water boiler. After lunch I prepare the New Year’s Eve dishes: salmon salad, appel fritters and the fried beef balls. After the last piece is deep fried, we pack everything into the cooling (isolating) box and drive to H.’s who is staying in the house of her help Amanda in Koumeika during the holidays. Amanda shows us the way the last stretch, steep on to a small road to the top of the village.

We have a nice chat while eating all the treats. Children drop by to sing carols and to get money after the reception of this the singing abruptly stops and they run to the next house. When we leave after some two hours we get a nice Christmas plate with cookies and some Christmas decorations from Amanda as presents.

Back home we watch tv. At midnight Greek time it rains so there is no use in me lightning the little sparklers that I still had somewhere. When the cabaret of Theo Maassen has ended on Dutch tv it is almost 1 o’clock so we go to sleep.

New Year’s Day starts cloudy but without wind so I continue my attack on the dandelions and thistles. Now around the terrace. At the end of the morning it starts to rain so I take a long coffee brake. The floater of the toilet then decides as a token of New Year’s good intentions that it is time to start leaking. We occupy ourselves with it for some time, but are not able to fix it. We drive to neighbours R. &D.’s place to see if they have better tools but they do not have what we are looking for. We also check their house and G. &D.’s, in both everything is ok. In they afternoon it stays dry so I do some more weeding.

In the evening it starts to rain again and during the night it gets worse with fierce showers and thunderstorms. The wind has changed to the north and to our dismay the roof of the bedroom starts leaking. We manoeuvre the bed more or less out of the way but it takes a long time before I get to sleep again, with all the ticking of the drops. We wake up late the next morning. It keeps on raining from time to time so I decide to bake a coconut cake. Which succeeds rather well.

Friday brings us some more rain - not very fierce - so we stay inside again. We clear away the Christmas decorations and I clean the deep frying pan. And we read and play games on the iPad. In the afternoon I want to make some tea and at that point the gas bottle is empty. We try to switch it with the new bottle we have at hand, but we are not able to loosen the bolt. Third time lucky! I drive to Thanassis and he helps us out with some heavier tools.

Saturdays it is sunny again so I get up early to continue gardening, this time weeding the dandelions and the thistles along the catwalk to the wooden cabin. F. clears away the Christmas tree. At 5 o'clock, when the sun sets, I have finished this stretch. My muscles slightly ache from the job.

Our last day, Sunday, also is a beautiful day. I decide to clear away the last part of the path behind the wooden cabin. For lunch we drive to Ormos - after we deliver the big container with cat food from R. & D's to Roula since R. & D.'s cats seem to live there during the winter. In Ormos we are warmly greeted by the lady from the restaurant. We chat with some locals who offer us a bottle of Fokianos and later on another man starts a conversation with us. It appears he is Michalis Folas from Vathi, who made the book on Samos flowers together with professor Düll and whom E. & I visited in his office in Vathi last June. And afterwards that same day we all had dinner in the restaurant of his brother Manolis in Agios Konstantinos, including Düll and his wife and my F. Michalis tells us that Düll is recovering from pneumonia and that he is still very weak. That might explain why I haven't yet gotten an answer to my letter with the dried *Narcissus serotinus* and the request for the DVD with plant pictures.

When we drive back we see Thanassis and Aris repairing the fence of the pig & sheep meadow. We say goodbye to them and again emphasize the need for the papers of the house to be handed over to our lawyer in order to change to household-electricity instead of construction electricity. We suddenly see Spider and Mythos, two of R. & D.'s cats. They seem to live at the pig's & sheep stables.

In the afternoon I finish the works on the path. When the sun sets we take everything inside the house and the wooden cabin and after a short night we drive to the airport. The sun rises all red from the sea behind Turkey when we leave Samos behind us. For not more than 3 months, we hope.

In the meantime

The new neighbours on the plot behind us won't come. It appears that the plot is too small to get permission to build on. Well, it will remain tranquil then. We also get an answer from Düll, he sends us a DVD with all his plant pictures. Through the social media we learn that holidays to Greece seem to increase, it is said 30% more bookings. In the *Margriet* (well-known Dutch ladies magazine) a special trip to Samos is offered for its readers. And there will be direct charter flights to Samos from Göteborg in Sweden and Aarhus in Denmark. Through FaceBook we learn that Thanassis will open his tavern *Bella Vista* in Pevkos again. He also occupies himself building a house on the high side of his vegetable garden, right under R. and D.'s house. But after he has finished the foundation and a big fence nothing more happens, we see from pictures D. and L. send. Also on FB we see that Manolis is expanding the terrace of his *Kalokairi Bar* in Pythagorion, way to the corner of the main street. Strategical, for now he is just opposite his biggest competitor at the other side of the main street.

April 2014

We have been given the green light for our departure and so, after an early spring, we take the train to Schiphol Airport as planned, on a rainy evening at the beginning of April. This time with a detour via The Hague, since there are works going on at the railways around Den Bosch.

At Schiphol the charter company Transavia welcomes us with the surprise that it has decided to diminish the maximum size of the hand luggage as of April 1st. So my lightweight hand suitcase that I just bought last year, has to go with the other suitcases After some more harassment about luggage and screaming babies we arrive at Samos. Underway however we talked to a man from Samos who lives in the Netherlands and he told us a.o. that the little restaurant at Pnaka is going back opening again. The son will now give it a try. Our car at the airport starts smoothly, but the cover of the spare wheel at the back of the car has been stolen! We drive to the Cash& Carry's and the Lidl's for groceries and arrive at our house 8 o'clock in the evening. F. is dead tired and falls into bed (and into a deep sleep). I am past fatigue and unpack everything before I go to sleep late in the evening.

We do wake up very late the next morning. Blacky reports for a bowl of cat food. It is cloudy so I stay inside and wash some of the covers and make a big vacuum cleaning tour. The next day, Friday, the sun is shining brightly so I wash the big covers of the couch and the chairs and hang them outside to dry. I seed herbs, zucchini and melons in pots and there even is some time left to walk to the small meadow under the old olive tree near H. and D.'s house to take pictures of the flowering small Samos orchids. I count 7 in total.

Saturday we first visit the hospital in Vathy since F. has caught a bladder infection - probably at the airport where he had to catheterise. We ask around for a while in Greek/English and finally are directed to the right department. We leave with a prescription for antibiotics which we collect and then drive on to Pythagorion where we have a cappuccino and apple pie on Manolis' and Effi's new terrace. After that we pick up neighbours R. and D. from the airport. When we drive through Koumeika we notice another taverna that has opened, not next to Maraki's but across the street alongside the parking. Maraki herself walks around her tavern with the well-known crutch under her armpit - like she never broke her knee.

In the orchard of Stamatis and Aphrodite next to us men are busy cutting the trees and burning the rests so the smoke clouds drift over our terrace. Stamatis apologises to us and I ask if the man (Albanian Viktor and his son) can come to our place to cut the weeds. Tomorrow afternoon, they promise. F. thinks they cut our water tubing but it appears that there is a general obstruction, I learn as I call mayor Kostas.

In the evening we have dinner with R. and D. We drive to Ormos, but there the restaurant on the corner is being renovated. Tomorrow it will be ready, they tell us. We drive on to Chrisopetro at the beginning of Votsalakia, which is open, and to our surprise the cook has been experimenting with adding new flavours to the food. Lamb's tongue in tomato sauce and pork with ginger .. delicious. The coriander flavoured fish patties are not on stock, unfortunately.

Sunday I start weeding the vegetable garden. I find that the rocket salad and the coriander have reproduced themselves ... nice. The men who promised to come and cut the weeds do not show up. Late in the afternoon neighbours K. and J. have also shown up and after

they've refreshed themselves the six of us drive to Ormos to try the renovated restaurant. There, it shows that „ready tomorrow” still is a flexible idea in Greece, but they manage to serve us a tasty meal.

Monday good ol' Tabby reports for duty. He has lost some weight but is not really skinny. I call Viktor to ask him when they will come for the weed-cutting: today, he promises. I also call Maraki's grandson Dimitris the plumber for the leaking toilet and the maintenance on the boiler. The weather is nice so I don't feel like cleaning inside the house, so I leave for another orchid-hunt. In the direction of C. and R.'s house I find back the other Samos orchid and another one across the entrance road of the grumpy old man's house. I find back the harlequin orchids but they are almost finished. I walk down the road behind C. and R.'s house but the Samos orchids there, under the pine trees, are gone. I suspect the big dragline that has ploughed the orchard a little bit further on has also trodden on these ones.

Then I take the car and drive to the old country road between Pevkos and Balos. The Samos orchids over there are finished but I find some tiny yellow ones, which appear to be the minor form of the common yellow orchid, my book says later on. And then Viktor drops by and starts cutting the weeds in the yard, together with his son. Of course he misinterprets me and all the orchids in the lawn are professionally decapitated. I manage to save the two near the bedroom window only because he asks me to move the car because it's in the way - which I ignore.

Tuesdays we drive to Karlovassi for some business. First we buy paint for the swimming pool at Sotiris', with the help of Amsterdam J., the boyfriend of Makoula of the Balos Cocktail Bar, who speaks fluent Greek. Then to Maria the hairdresser where D. and F. and I have our hair cut. Then some shopping and finally I meet with our attorney. He surprises us by announcing that after 2 years of asking Thanassis and his family, the paperwork of the construction of our house has finally been handed in. So now we can finally proceed to apply for the „household” electricity since next summer the permit for the „construction” electricity will definitely come to an end. Back to our house I sweep the (empty) swimming pool and to our dismay we notice that the layer of paint also bladders a little bit, like in R. and D.'s pool. We consult R. and decide that we will ask Giannis the plasterer, Amanda's husband, for an expert opinion with J. as translator, after Easter. We get Tabby and sprinkle him with anti-flea drops and cold chamomile tea for his snotty eyes. Blacky we can only throw anti flea drops on from a short distance.

Wednesday we have an outing. First to the post office in Pyrgos (newly discovered) to arrange that in the future our mail will be delivered in Maraki's tavern in Koumeika. Then we drive on to the Karvounis, the peak of the Ampelos mountain. It is cold up there but I manage to take a lot of pictures of new orchid species and other plants. On the way back we buy a new cover for the spare wheel of the car at our garage - I see I can put a little chain with a lock on it. We also make a stop at R. in Koumaradei and at R. and D.'s who are cutting the top layer out of the swimming pool floor themselves. Heavy labour, I don't see ourselves doing that in our pool. Thursday we return to the hospital for the result of the tests of F.'s bladder infection and after another period of asking around and waiting we come out with a follow-up recipe for some more antibiotics. We get the medication from the Dutch wife of the pharmacist in Kokkari and move on to the Bournias mountain. There we find some more interesting orchids. At night it starts to rain, and it leaks especially in our bedroom. J. from Amsterdam also promised to have a look at it - according to R. from

Koumaradei it is caused by the fact that the roofs are not built steep enough over here so the water creeps under the tiles and hangs there.

Dimitris the plumber drops by and repairs the toilet for the time being - after three flushes it leaks again. Me think it just needs a new floater. He promises to return after Easter and take down the boiler to decalcify it at his place. Friday we take it easy and stay at home, enjoying the sunshine. Friday night it also rains, and leaks, but the weather forecast promises us that after that it will stay dry.

Saturday brings us again dry and sunny weather but a bit chilly. I find a pair of garden scissors with extensible arms so I decide to cut some more dandelions and thistles. Also the fast growing carob tree seedlings need a good trimming. It is heavy work so after dinner I take a good rest. For at half past ten neighbours R. and D. come to pick us up for the Easter Eve Night Mass in the church in Skouraiika. We finally get a chance to see inside this huge church. It is full with people, many of them well-known to us. Even Thanassis and Roula are present, we never saw them on any religious gathering Yes, election time is approaching ... it is advanced this year, to the 18th of May and not in November; F. now just cannot vote since it now is not the full 5 years since he is registered here ... Here the men and the women still have separate parts where they sit ... Mass is a lot of singing by the church elders. Eventually we can get our candlesticks lit by the pope and outside the story continues accompanied by a lot of very loud explosions from fireworks. At midnight it is done and the tradition prescribes that you carry your lit candlestick all the way home. Some people have transferred the light into a small lamp which is not so sensitive to wind. We try to carry it as far as our parked car. We then drive to Amanda's where we are invited for a light meal. Her husband Giannis, son Diamantis, daughter-in-law Maria, granddaughter Nefelis and of course H. are present so we are 11 in total. F. gets to eat a plate of margaritsa-soup, good for his „system“, Amanda claims. We fall into bed at 3 o'clock.

Easter Sunday all the present 6 members of our pareia drive to the Cypriot restaurant Stella at Balos where Kyriakos has prepared us a special Easter meal. We enjoy the tasteful dishes and get back home as the sun almost sets on this nice day.

Monday Amsterdam J., Giannis and neighbour R. drop by early to see what has to be done about our swimming pool. It appears to be not very much work. They will encounter some difficulties getting the materials, since today is Second Easter Day, tomorrow some patron's day in Karlovassi and Wednesday St. George in Koumeika. I start to clear the path behind the wooden house, which I continue Tuesday. It looks great if I may say so. However, it has suddenly turned into summer so it is high time to start using sun screen oil. I forget to put it on my ears, I painfully notice at the end of the day when I take a hot shower to relax my tired muscles. Tuesday night is shellfish night at Kyriakos' restaurant. However he has quite a few other customers so it is quite late when we are finished with the scampis, mussels and langoustini.

Wednesday it is already two weeks since we arrived so time for a visit to the Lidl's again. They sell white asparagus from Kavala!! And the house needs cleaning again. Nights we enjoy the asparaguses. Thursday morning we drive to Koumeika since Amanda's Giannis has told us that - o progress - postboxes are made available in the village. Maraki's help shows us the back entrance of the village community centre with a waiting room - where we have to wait for our turn since the local doctor also uses the bureau as his office. Young Christos who speaks perfectly English writes down our name and tells us that we can pick

up the key tomorrow. I also accompany neighbour R. to the office since he already goes home tomorrow so I'll have to pick up his key. We have coffee at Maraki's - also being shown the big scar of the operation on her knee - and chat with Aris and his son Remos. Back home I continue the weeding of the garden path. Dimitris shows up to take the boiler to his workplace to decalcify it. He also gives another try on the leaking floater of our toilet. Nights we eat at K. and J., a sort of farewell dinner for R. and D. K. has cooked delicious Thai food and I baked an apple pie for desert - filled to the brim we return home.

Fridays Amsterdam J. arrives early to remove the layer of loose paint from our swimming pool with a high pressure cleaner - he is busy all morning. The infrared camera has captured a stone marten tonight, after some local cats, a dog and a mouse. It is clearly visible. I drive to Koumeika for the keys of the post boxes but the community centre is closed. By asking around I get to a man with a list of names - we are on it - and another man with a bag of keys. But I can only collect the keys at noon in another office. That I do and indeed we now are the proud owners of a real post box A4 size 6 cms high.

I continue to weed but actually the soil is getting too dry and I only manage to tear of the leaves with the roots still in the ground. I give up after a couple of hours, next Sunday some rain is expected. Dimitris and his father return the sun boiler and install a new floater in the toilet.

Saturday J. comes back to finish the cleaning swimming pool. It shows that the second layer of paint gets loose more and more, so we decide to leave it for this year and only paint some „naked” spots. Next year then we shall remove the complete second layer. I decide to give the blinds and the windows a thorough dusting from the outside, and the seedlings need thinning out too.

The last Sunday of April starts cloudy. I plan to get some gravel from the heap at the turning point on the public road next to our house, leftovers from the construction of our swimming pool. But it turns out that most of it is solidified concrete, so I do not manage to accumulate as much as I had hoped for. But still enough to cover some 20 more metres of my garden path. At night it starts to rain, it leaks a bit into the house again, but not much.

Mondays we drive to the hospital again. After more than an hour of waiting we are ready within 5 minutes, with the assignment to deliver a urine sample in a week for another control. This all after I put a fancy Athenian back in line, in Greek, who apparently thought waiting was only for the ordinary folks and not for him. We run some errands and drive back home, where it is dry and a bit windy. I start weeding the petanque field. At night we have dinner at Themo's in Balos, together with neighbours K. & J. and G. & D. who arrived today. We dine indoors, outside it is too chilly.

Tuesday the sun shines again so I continue weeding. Wednesday it rains again so high time for some inside odd jobs.

May 2014

First of May (Πρωτημύιο) is a holiday in Greece. Labour Day, birthday of Demeter, goddess of fertility and agriculture, and the start of the tourist season. To honour Demeter I hang the (artificial) garland of flowers above the entrance door. Some people, we see, have attached a real bunch of flowers on the hood of their car. We should do that too! We have lunch at Themo's in Balos where the restaurant is filled to the brim. Everybody wishes each other

Καλό μήνα, „Good month” literally. In the afternoon I remove the last weeds from the petanque court and at night we have a chat at neighbours K. and J. where neighbours G. and D. are too.

Friday morning it is a bit cloudy. When I open the door cat Tabby slips inside together with the first scorpion of the season. Tabby I put outside and the scorpion is taken to another world. I clear some more metres of the garden path and in the afternoon J. and I go for a walk. As my condition is in bad shape we only make a small tour.

Saturday evening we join G. and D. to have souvlakis at the taverna of mother and son in Skouraiika. It is a hearty welcome but there are only a few customers. On the way back we are barely able to avoid a collision with a big hare.

Sunday is cloudy with some light rain so we take a lazy day. Monday we report for duty at the hospital again with a sample of urine for a control; afterwards we go shopping at the Lidl's since we are close by. Tuesday and Wednesday I continue to weed the garden path. It is dry so finally the bare spots in the pool can be painted. There is a strong wind but it is sunny although the temperature is a bit low for May (a little above 20C in the sunshine, evenings relatively cool). Wednesday evening we have dinner at Themo's to celebrate that neighbours H. and J. have arrived too. Themo is happy that we dine at his place and not at Bella Vista's so he treats us with drinks. Thursday we ourselves go for the lab results of the urine culture and then report to the urologist. Who takes one look at the paper with the results and then declares F. cured. In the afternoon I complete the weeding of the garden path; the little olive orchard at the back is a project for next year.

Friday is cloudy again, but dry. The pool is filled and I give the filter a thorough cleaning. Architect Makris drops by for the paperwork of our house; luckily he comes together with his wife who is more fluent in English than he. He measures everything including the wooden cabin and we discuss what to do next. Saturday it is cold, only 17 C, so we do some odd jobs inside. It also rains from time to time. The pool slowly fills but I am afraid it will take a while before the water has a nice temperature. I collect some bills at Thanassis' and have a look in the postboxes in Koumeika. R. and D. sent us a postcard from Athens, how nice! They themselves have a bill for someone else in their postbox which I give to Maraki in the tavern to hand it over to the right person. She grumbles for a while about postmen not doing their job properly. Sunday we discover a big black hairy spider of some 7 cm on the wall outside the house; the cat passes it at a respectable distance. The spider gets up on its hind legs, like threatening, as Tabby passes it again. It is a ladybird spider, we find, quite harmless if you leave it in peace. It also is the last day for neighbours K. and J. so we have a farewell dinner at Stella's, Kyriakos cooks us some nice dishes as usual.

Monday it is a bit more sunny and warmer again. We drive to the Lidl's who have a French week but the French cheeses haven't arrived to our disappointment. We do buy a few bottles of Cotes du Rhone. After a visit to the gas station and some more errands we have coffee at E. and R.'s in Koumaradei. E. has just arrived together with the dog. We make plans for some jeep safaris. We have lunch in Pythagorion at Ambrosia's where I have a nice lamb souvlaki. After that we pick up our Swiss neighbours C. and R. and drive back to Skouraiika while we exchange the latest news.

Tuesday we start with removing a little snake from our premises, the first one of the year. It is the same species as the one last year, the aggressive but harmless (to humans) cat snake. The cat itself is totally not disturbed by it and quietly drinks from the water can standing

next to it. Then we drive to Karlovassi where we stop by Makris' office to have our application for the license of our house filled in on line on the computer. We skip the idea of including the wooden cabin because for some reason that is outrageously expensive. We do have to take it down then if we want to sell the property ... After we validated our signatures for the application in the town hall we are done and walk over to the old plateia for a coffee. There we ran in to about all of our neighbours and after some refreshments we decide to join them for lunch in the little restaurant in the street where the lawyer resides.

Wednesday is cleaning day. Thursday afternoon the present members of the pareia gather at our pétanque field for a little match. The men's team wins convincingly this time. Tabby also joins us again. Afterwards we get down to the house where on the terrace we eat the food that everybody has brought.

Friday morning around half past 9 we see the Transavia airplane fly over our heads. It brings F.'s old study mate T. and his wife E. for a week's holiday on Samos. At 5 we drive to them in their hotel in Votsalakia, where they hopefully already will have had the opportunity to catch up with the missed hours of sleep from last night that afternoon.

We do a lot of excursions that week. We take a picknick on a mountain meadow of the Karvounis. A month ago it was filled with monkey orchids, now there are pyramid orchids everywhere. Underways we encounter two dead stone martens and a happily crawling tortoise. We put it in an orchard for safety. H. celebrates her birthday so we also have an extra dining at Themo's. There we hear that Kostas was reelected as „village mayor" last Sunday, Takis wound up second. Thanassis did not make it as governor of the North Aegean province, but a lady from his party got the most votes. As she did not obtain the minimum of 50% of the votes however, next Sunday there is another election round between the two candidates which got the most votes; the same applies for the mayor of the whole municipality of Samos.

The weather gradually rises to summer values so we are able to persuade T. and E. to go into the swimming pool to do a foto shoot for our collection. When they return to the Netherlands the temperature is such as that we have to close the blinds during mid-day. After a few days the water temperature has risen to 26° C so I take a nice first swim of the season.

In the meanwhile we have observed, with growing concern, that some olive trees are slowly dying. Last year one tree started getting brown leaves, and this year the one next to it starts to do the same. We want to prevent it getting to the neighbours' olive trees since they use them to press oil from the olives. We ask around and are eventually informed that it is a fungal infection, Verticillum something, which lives in not well drained soil (?). It infiltrates into the trees via the vessels. Amsterdam J. arrives and saws off the trees. Taki from Koumeika will come to get the stump out of the ground with a digging machine. After that we have to sterilise the soil by a heat treatment (putting anti rooting plastic on it and let the sun do its work all summer).

Behind the house it smells a bit like gas, we suspect that the tubing between the gas bottle outside and the gas stove inside has become porous after 5 years. We buy a new one and fix it, but the gas smell remains. Then, after a check with some soapy water, we notice that it is the connection between the bottle and the regulator valve that leaks, it had not been properly adjusted the last time the bottle was refreshed. Well, never too old to learn. However, the

bottle is empty only a few days later by all this leaking. Fortunately we always keep a fresh bottle in stock.

With neighbours C. and R. and with E. from Koumaradei we make an extensive tour around Mount Ampelos and the surrounding area. Relatively early we arrive at the little church on top of the Karvounis, where I hear the soft grunting of a wild boar. I walk to the spot but I do not see it anymore. We drive on, over yet unexplored tracks, to my delight. Almost at the end we see a bunch of violet orchids which are new to us, so they are added to our (photo) collection. I spent the most of the next day looking up the names of the newly discovered plant species. Which is not too bad since it is a cloudy day for a change with some rain, just enough for the plants in the vegetable garden.

We end May by having souvlaki's at mayor Kostas' tavern in Skouraiika, together with neighbours H. and J.

June 2014

June starts with a few days of light thunder- and rain showers. Not cold, but not warm either. Time for a garden weeding. Neighbour R. leaves and she leaves me a few plant cuts for me and neighbour J. They need caring for.

Gardening in this climate is a matter of trying everything and learning from experiences. As it has been relatively cold in spring, the seedlings grow slowly. When it then gets hot for a few days, it seems like they are scared off by it and shrink from fear. Next year I immediately intend to start with plants from the local store here, not with seed, with the exception of course what is not available (radish, paksoi, and kohlrabi). And fresh seed every year, for when you use the remainders of the seeds from last year, the germinative power is far less. The strawberries only start to give fruits now, and I pick the first small artichokes before the flowers open; the plant has survived the winter over here.

What really does like the climate over here are the succulents and the cuttings I took from a thrown away prickly pear cactus at the roadside. Neighbour R. and I also made cuttings from an abandoned ficus elastica, about half of the cuttings grew on. Neighbours R. and D. also got one. I put mine in the vegetable garden at the end of October last year, just before we left for the NL. But the leaves are a bit yellowish-green, not to my liking. After consultation with neighbour R. results in that it probably does not like the (poor) red loam it is standing in, so I dig a hole around the roots and fill it with (rich) alum earth. The cactus cuttings I put in the ground near the wooden cabin and it thanks me by growing new „leaves”.

From Belgium neighbour R. brought me some perennial Vietnamese coriander plants, but however they do not like sunshine nor heat. I put them behind the folded up washing line mill, the coolest spot outside. Probably, in Vietnam they live high up in the mountains in a shaded wood or something The rosemary plant I had grown has given up when I tried to move it; it became too big. Well, I'll have to take new head cuttings at neighbours R. and C., I read on the internet. The same applies for the thymian savoury and the oregano. Borage from seed. Throughout the years I already got thyme, mint, Chinese chives, marjory and basil in my herb garden, rocket salad and coriander reproduce themselves.

Neighbour R. also gathered seed from the tall wild onion, *Allium nigrum*, and spread it out in her garden, which went well. I want to do that too. Eventually that turned out well with

the hollyhock, not yet with the juniper and the hazelnut. The success of the sea squill remains to be seen.

One of the first days of June we drive to Marathokampos, where F. wants to renew his proof of domiciliation, for it was only valid for 5 years. But at the police station we are told that the document is valid for ever (it does indeed hold no end-date). It is considered rather strange that I want such a proof for myself. I can always use F.'s one, I am told, even when I turn a widow. That I use another family name (my own) does not even appear in the man's head. When I do want to apply I also have to show a valid Greek bank account with my name first (with a minimum of 500 euro on it). Since ours has F.'s name as first one, we leave the matter to be.

The Friday before the Whit Sunday weekend, we drive to the Karlovassi harbour for a long weekend Ikaria. After instructing H. and J. about cats, plants and swimming pool, feeding R. and C.'s stray cats (who had succeeded in getting the lid of the container of cat food and eating most of it) and after observing the progress at R. and D.'s swimming pool (none).

When we buy tickets for the ferry boats we learn that due to Whit Monday the ferry boat back only leaves late in the afternoon, so we decide to take the big car ferry back (which leaves from Evidilos). That might be better, for as we sail to Agios Kyrikos in the small ferry boat the waves make it rock heavily. Together with the stifling heat in the lounge and the strong cappuccino I had before departure, I actually get a bit sea sick. But it passes and with half an hour delay we disembark. After some inquiries we arrive at the hotel which I reserved via the internet. We have a rest and walk back to the harbour for dinner - the car rental agencies already have closed. Ikaria is far more sleepy than Samos - many items on the menu of the restaurant are not yet available. The tourist season clearly has not started here yet. Apart from two other Dutchies we were the only tourists on the ferry

At the beginning of the evening the wind catches up but it lies down again. We have a nightcap at Akti's Bar on a rocky hill near the centre with view on the harbour.

The next morning there still is some wind but it is relatively warm. We have an early breakfast at the harbour - limited choice again. When we want to rent a car at the only agency which is open this hour, we get to hear that a car can only be available at noon. So we kill the time by admiring the sculpture of the fallen Icarus at the harbour and studying the just bought road map.

Driving in a car with manual gear I did not unlearn after 5 years of automatic gear, but I have to get used (again) to using it correctly in the small and steep country roads. We drive at a slow pace around the east side of the island through even more sleepy villages, to the north side. At some nice view points we stop and get out to take pictures. We can see „our” Kerkis, always with a little cloud around or above its peak. And there is the only cork oak in Greece (says our guide) in Monokampi. We also fill up the tank and notice that the gasoline is even 10 cents per liter more expensive than on Samos.

When we have a late lunch at Evidilos (sorry, goat chops not yet available), the car ferry from Athens sails into the harbour. But according to my recently in Karlovassi collected schedule, there actually is no car ferry on Saturdays ... must be the Whit Sunday weekend. It is a relatively new ship this year, the Nissos Mykonos from Hellenic Seaways. Not the old rusty Mytinili from Nell Lines.

The white wine we drink at lunch tastes like acetone (like in Kerveli) or home made sherry which went wrong (G. and D.'s neighbour Giorgos), but well, we won't drink too much of it then.

At a quarter to 4 we drive back, together with the ferry boat which heads for Karlovassi. We drive through the centre of the island, up to about 800 m, back to Agios Kyrikos; the last stretch of this road was recently completed. A couple of times we take the wrong turn, for it is difficult to distinguish between the narrow potholed „main” road and the local roads. Road signs are absent a lot of times. At 6 o'clock we are back at the hotel where we have a rest. At night we have some drinks, and we buy a bottle of sweet, port-like red wine from Ikaria. When we walk back to the hotel the wind has gone and it is warm, even a bit humid. We sleep with the windows wide open (but the Venetian blinds shut).

Whit Sunday we north-west side of the island. The weather is beautiful. We have a drink and an internet-session and then stroll to restaurant Paschalia, recommended by our fellow student Greek R., herself being half-Greek. The father works in the kitchen and the sun waits around. We do not see the old mother. We regale on a super fresh fish (sea barbel) and some very nice white wine from the house. We trudge back to our hotel where we - as usual - have a rest and later on a drink at the harbour.

Whit Monday we sleep late and get our things into the little suitcase. After a delayed breakfast we drive to Evdilos, where we leave the car at the parking area near the harbour. It is hot so we have a frappé on a shady terrace. We have lunch at the same restaurant as two days ago, and now tourist season has started for F. enjoys a nice spaghetti with seafood and I behead and dismember some 6 big grilled scampis. Only minus: the red house wine is almost as bad as the white one.

The ferry leaves for Karlovassi on the spot and one hour and a quarter later we get into our good old own car which is waiting for us at the harbour like a faithful dog. After some shopping at the Lidl's (where we meet J. and Fr. from the Double Monarchy) we drive home where Tabby and Blacky await us. We unpack only what we need and enjoy the sultry evening (it appears that it rained a bit before we arrived) at Home Sweet Home.

We take a good rest and then start cleaning the house. Next we prepare the wooden cabin because our friend D. from Canada (whom we met on a cruise around Antarctica) is coming to Samos for a few days. Fridaynight we pick him up from the ferry from Kusadasi in Turkey, with a fat delay. Luckily Themo at Balos is still open to serve us dinner. The next day we make a tour around the island. First to the top of the Karvounis, then lunch at Mytilini and we take the coastal route via Spatharei back home after a quick look at Hera's temple in Ireion. . In the evening we have dinner at Kyriakos Cypriot restaurant. Saturdays we drive to Pythagorion where we visit the Archeological Museum and have a drink at a terrace at the harbour afterwards. Then we put D. on a plane to Thessaloniki. See Samos in 48 hours, how very American!

In the meanwhile summer and the WC Soccer have started. We take it easy and watch some of the games. The Greeks perform badly, the Dutchies play their 1st game brilliantly from time to time, to our astonishment.

Neighbours H. and J. shortly return to Belgium, so we have a farewell dinner at restaurant Mylos from Giannis, in Balos, which reopened after 5 years. On the way back we spot a jackal, clearly visible in the headlights of the car. Nice. A few days earlier we saw a marten

run across the road, and some little owls (or, more correctly: nightjars) who sat on the asphalt. All too dark and/or too quick for my camera, alas.

We take it easy to get used to the warm summer weather. Thursday Giannis, Amanda's husband, suddenly appears at our doorstep. He reports that the next Saturday he will come and repair the cracks in the cement around the swimming pool and the terrace. At 7.30 that Saturday he already is at our gate. One of the lamps of our swimming pool has gone broke, as we lift of the lid we can only reach the wiring and not the lamp itself. As the wiring is ok we have to replace the lamp which we can only do when the pool is empty. Stupid construction, it is made watertight with silicone kit. A lamp only has a limited lifespan so it has to be replaced one day To our surprise however the lamp works again after a few days.

We buy some extra anti-root plastic and cover the area around the stump of the cut off infected olive tree with it, for heat-sterilisation of the soil. That Taki with the digging machine to take out the stumps has not come yet. Perhaps neighbour R. (arriving Sunday) knows him, Amsterdam J. has left Samos for the NL until the end of September R. does not, but R. is called by J. one day who promises to kick Takis ass.

Our car gets a big service in the garage, the oil from the automatic gear has to be replaced. We skip the idea of travelling around West-Turkey with our own car when we hear from newly arrived neighbours D. and L. how Turkish customs took their car almost completely apart for inspection. Since car fares on ferries aren't cheap either we'll rent one.

Stray cat Blackie in the meanwhile has established his position in the pecking order and has lost almost all of his dirty felted fur. Tabby tolerates him but shows him his place at least once a day. When I stroke Blackie one day Tabby gets enormously jealous and takes it out on Blackie with an extra round of snarls. A few days later Blackie has a swollen head due to an infected wound, but luckily it diminishes after some more days.

The postal service does not really work well yet; when I make a trip to the postbox and Maraki's tavern I wind up at Thanassis' restaurant where most of the mail still is delivered. Including an official letter which we do not understand; the lawyer says it is a refund of the twice paid road tax 2014. We give him a power of attorney so he can handle it for us in Vathi. Also we get called twice by the DEH (electricity company) to give our home address for a registered letter. We end up by agreeing that it will be delivered at the post office of Marathokampos. Thus we collect the letter, and it is the exactly the same letter as last year about prolongation of the permit for building electricity. Papakonstantinou promises that he will take care of the matter together with architect Makris.

After a week of warm weather the Meltemi starts blowing. Especially at night the wind is really fierce. F. has to get out of bed to collect blown away garden chairs and cushions. But then the Meltemi lies down and then it gets really hot.

In the meanwhile the football fever rises too. Both NL and Belgium play well and the speculations on a Clash of the Low Lands get bigger and bigger. But when both are kicked out of the tournament it dies down quickly too.

In the meanwhile we renew the acquaintance with our Flemish neighbours Y. and N. and their twin daughters. Last year we missed each other so there's a lot to catch up. Y. also sends us a man who is expert on solar heating of swimmingpools. He however advises us

against it for you would need many solar panels and thus a big investment. Instead he recommends us a low energy heating pump. He will send us an proposition by email. The last day of our three month stay on Samos is due and of course a farewell dinner is held. The *παρέα* is large this time, we are 13 at Kyriakos' restaurant Stella.

August 2014

Despite our third time intention not to drag so much things with us we wind up with two heavy suitcases to take along. Partly necessary but also due to the fact that R. has endowed us with an elaborate set of big German gründlich solar garden lamps. We also received the offer for a water heating pump, not cheap. But that also means an extra €200 per month for the electricity required for heating the water, I find on the internet. That is a stiff amount. And do-it-yourself solar panels are only meant for tiny swimming pools. What looks reasonable is a set of large so-called transparant solar rings which you lay on the surface of the water and which act as a sort of hothouse. Well, maybe next season.

I have loaded many new books on my iPad so I am not bored while we travel or wait. But not for the Dutch Railways which offer us a free extra bus ride since there is an unexpected obstruction on the track from Eindhoven - dragging the suitcases down the stairs of the platform since the escalators go in the opposite direction (up). We arrive on Samos with no further delay. After shopping at the Lidl's we just clear away the food which needs storing in the refrigerator and freezer. After opening the blinds two large scorpions fall into my room. One is sent to heaven but the other disappears under the closet. I do not find it anymore even after a thorough vacuum cleaning the next day (it reappears several days later at night when F. has to go to the toilet, with the same destiny as his friend eventually). At half past 8 we sit down at Themos' restaurant in Balos where R. & D. and H. await us. When we return home Tabby and Blackie again await us for an evening snack.

We have a good night's sleep and devote ourselves to cleaning the house and the pool that week. We also install the new solar garden lamps but that leaves us with a „first world problem” since our neighbour B. in Maastricht has been able to repair the old ones so we have some 10 extra. The solar balls for the swimming pool from the Aldi's however have all broken down except two.

In Karlovassi we meet with architect Makris just before summer holidiay closure. He assures us the electricity matter has been settled for another year - just as we had heard from our lawyer by e-mail. Him however we see speeding by on his bike before we get a chance to say hello and thank you. The paperwork for the house has not been sent in yet however, Makris also reports. After that we pay the fire insurance for our house at the post office and pass by the lady of the insurance to tell her so. We drive on to Kampos Vourliotes to collect the insurance papers of the car and also have new back window wipers fixed - again the old one was all dry and crumbled under the hot sun. We also pass at R. & D.'s to meet their new dog Elly but it is terrified by us (or any other stranger, we are told). God knows what life it had before it was adopted

We drive to Marathokampos with the number and use of our water meter. since neighbours Y. and N. had told us that the water bill has to be paid separately. We never received a bill however and still have water so we try to solve the riddle. After some asking around we find the Δημαρχείο (Town Hall) were Maki, the town secretary from Koumeika, looks into his computer for us. He cannot find the registration and gives us the telephone numer of some

Manolis, but the man only speaks Greek. We decide to ask mayor Kostas about the matter when we have souvlakis the next Saturday in his tavern in Skouraiika. Maybe it is an unregistered meter which Thanassis installed while he was mayor Kostas promises to drop by and look into the matter.

It is warm, 35°C in the shade. The pool and sometimes a bit of wind refreshen us. One day we even have some raindrops. I put the newly sowed cover for the hot water solar system over the solar panel and leave it open for 1/4. That is enough for our hot water supply mid-summer, so the water will not start to boil inside, on which the limestone deposits may harm the apparatus.

5 August is the annual feast in Koumeika. We are at a table of five with R. & D. and H; the plateia is loaded to the brim. There are a lot of young people present; we think they have come „home” for the summer holidays. Amanda’s Giannis helps out with the grilling of the souvlakis. There is a lot of dancing on the live music, and also some traditional dances in costumes. When the prices of the lottery are announced (half past 1) we discover that we all have won something.

For Sunday lunch we drive to Chrisopetros at the beginning of Votsalakia where we eat a delicious fresh fish. Elly the dog quietly sits in the back of our car when we drive, she gets used to us, not so scared anymore.

The rest of the week we do some odd jobs around the house and Friday’s we decide to go to Karlovassi for some errands. Before we stop at neighbours R. and D. to give them our anti-wasp spray. I stumble as I step on their terrace and to my horror I see a large cut in the skin of my shin. It looks like it is ripped open. A varicose vein has been damaged so there is a lot of blood too. I can see my shin bone and immediately realize that it has to be stitched together. After I call for some time I get help. R. puts me in his car and drives to the little hospital in Karlovassi. There I am helped with great speed and after some grinding of teeth I wind up with 5 classical stitches in the skin of my shin and a dose of antibiotics. We drive back and still are on time to have lunch at Kyriakos/Stella in Balos with E. and some friends of hers. We return home and put my leg up for the rest of the afternoon. It does not hurt when the sedation has worn off but no swimming for some time (again)!

Saturdays we have souvlakis at the other taverna in Skouraiika whre we chat up with Greek-American Cindy from Boston who stays here for the entire summer. Sundays we drive to Pythagorion for when we met Monika at the post office in Karlovassi she told us there’d be another full moon concert at the temple of Hera in Ireon. But first we go and try the Sushi Bar Unan at the Doryssa Bay Hotel which Sandy recommended us. It really is to our liking so we decide to come back soon. The concert is nice again and on the way back we have a drink at the Meteora taverna high in the hills overlooking valley and the bay of Pythagorion. The next week we run the delayed errands and visit the Princess Tia Hotel at Balos to listen to the live music and chat up with B. from New York and H. We skip the House Party at Esperos and the Onion Feast (yuk) at Balos.

After a week of abstinence the doctor allows me to go swimming again; although the stitches will have to stay somewhat longer.

The second half of August starts with strong winds. Which makes that it does not feel so hot. At the little hospital in Karlovassi we only have to wait for half an hour before it is my turn and in no time the stitches in my leg are removed. Back home Tabby and Blackie

amaze us since they are taking an afternoon nap lying shoulder to shoulder on the garden bench without any fights. Friends at last?

The winds lie down and it gets really hot again. We sit outside in the shade until noon and then go inside till about 6 o'clock. Then it is time for an swim and afterwards we sit in the shade at the back of the house until the sun sets. Then we take care of the garden. The bushes have grown a lot since last April, so we buy ourselves a long pole with cutting scissors at the end to trim the greens - for our view over the Aegean Sea. A few days later we suddenly see a short toed eagle flying relatively low over our heads, holding a snake in its claws. In the air it eats the snake. Unfortunately the lens of our camera was dirty so we did not succeed in taking a picture. On FaceBook I find that a couple of sperm whales have been observed in the sea not too far from our house.

Friday the 22nd is the annual Panagia (AllSaint) in the little chapel at Pevkos. We arrive really late since a friend of neighbours D. and L. keeps treating us on drinks at Stella's restaurant in Balos. However, the sexton welcomes us wholeheartedly and puts us at a small table where he supplies us with food and more drinks. We ran into Giannis from Rodopi = without Rodopi. He is with a sister which he leads. He does not look well, we think.

The next day is the village feast at Skouraiika to celebrate the Panagia from the day before. The annual Onion Feast at Balos has even been moved so they don't coincide anymore. In front of the taverna of mayor Kostas tables have been set out all along the street and the big church. Thassos has dressed for the occasion in a very nice apron and helps preparing the food. We eat and drink some (-what less than the day before) and listen to the music which is rather loud, alas. The dancing only begins when one of the musicians takes out his clarinet and the band starts playing Nisiotika - Island music. Through the clarinet you can clearly hear the influence of Minor Asia - it even sounds Turkish from time to time (...). Again I notice that the dancing strengthens the bonds between the villagers. Old grannies in flower print dresses and grey permanent waves hairdoes dance together with (previously boring looking) minimally dressed teenager girls. One woman who presumably hasn't seen a hair dresser for many years and whose glasses so old-fashioned that they are hip again, almost dances the stars from the sky (Old Dutch saying). It seems that Greek dancing is taught throughout the whole primary and secondary school - compulsory, at least one hour a week. I get annoyed by young man in a green shirt who - sitting at ease next to his brother - bosses his young wife with baby and toddler around all the time. Only once in a while she is allowed to go for a dance. We only go home after I promised little Evaggelista and mayor Kostas that this year I will really really make apple pie for everybody on Ag'Ioannis (Sept. 26th) at the little church in the valley below our house.

Neighbours R. and D. have met with a doctor from Athens and his wife who was born and raised here, and who come down every summer for their children to have some fresh air. The doctor's wife told them that the sweet little granny in the tavern of Mother and Son in Skouraiika (one of the three sisters of which the second one died and the third one now only visits her son Kostas the mayor's tavern), was a Resistance fighter during the Second World War and went out on to the mountains with a machine gun hanging from her shoulder. We calculate that she must be around 90 by now ... Also it seems that there are still men alive who collaborated with the nazis and one day came in to Skouraiika to execute some Resistance men. They wore balaclavas but some of the villagers recognised them none the less.

The next Sunday we make a trip to Manolates with neighbours R. and D. and have lunch at the elevated taverna of Loukas. Afterwards we have a drink on the village square of Vourliotes. On the way back we skip the yearly presentation of the Samiotic patissiers at Pyrgos since it is too hot We save that for next year.

The last week of August arrives and we start it with a round of shopping and after that, together with neighbour R, picking up neighbours G. and D. (with guests P. and A.) and H. and J. at the airport. We also run in to our Swiss neighbours C. and R. and their house friend D. We have a coffee stop at the Meteora cafe high on the mountain hill and then deliver the whole bunch at their houses. In the evening the reunion of the παρέα is celebrated with a dinner at Themos' restaurant in Balos. The young man of the agriculture shop at the junction to Marathokampos is there too with his family - he got married two days before (he started his bachelor's eve at the feast in Skouraiika Friday evening). We congratulate him and get a little bag with wedding sweets. And architect Makris with his wife (nicely dressed up) are also having dinner with a group. Afterwards neighbours R. and D., Amsterdam H. and us have some cocktails at Makoula's. Another late night, so the next few days we really take it easy. Not in the least because the strong, cooling winds from the last days are slowly lying down again.

We drop by at our neighbours R. and D. who have their sailing friends W. and E. over. They rented a little car which had two flat tyres on the rough road to R. and D.'s house. The road at the moment contains many potholes and big stones, and mayor Kostas has promised to drop by with a big shovel to smoothen in out. But so far he hasn't shown up, so next Saturday we again have souvlaki's at his tavern where R. and D. carefully remind him of it. He will also deal with the matter of our water meter.

We start the annual struggle with the tiny ants which are resistant to the boxes with ant poison. They worm their way into our house by the tiniest of holes between the door posts and the wall. F. empties a whole bottle of silicone kit into it before they finally give in a little bit. Cat food is their favourite, so we pack it in an extra tight plastic box. Also we have a few short power cuts that week. And one of them causes the cooling part of our freezer-refrigerator to get disordered. We try to reset it but can't get it back to full cooling mode. Since our guarantee has ended (purchased June 2012) we decide it is time to call a handyman.

September 2014

Again we make a tour around the Kerkis with our Swiss neighbours C., R. and D. and Belgian E. We have a break for drinks in the old tavern/living room in Kosmadei of a friendly old lady who of course knows E. We have lunch in the fish restaurant at Agios Nikolaos. After that we drive home via Ydroussa and Platanos. In Platanos we get stuck for a while since a van is delivering supplies but as usual the problem is solved with some patience. I however damage the back side of the car a little bit so we have to drive to the garage to arrange for the repair.

The next Monday I drop F. at the harbour of Karlovassi and drive on to the garage where I leave the car. I take the bus to Karlovassi and there we have some drinks until it is time to take the ferry to Mykonos. Just when neighbours K. and J. leave the ferry in their cabrio, what a coincidence! We arrive right on time at half past 8 at the new ferry harbour of Mykonos. There we take the bus to town but after some searching we take a taxi for the last

stretch to our hotel. When we have unpacked we walk downtown again for a nightcap. The town is very busy with overloaded narrow streets, shops open till late, restaurants and loud music. On a terrace we have a drink and watch the parade of mostly very young people. One looking even more extravagant than the other, up to big tattoos and nipple piercings the size of a bull's nose ring.

The next morning we walk to the old harbour where we have breakfast and then take the boat to Delos, our ultimate destination for this trip. The guide expertly leads us around the excavations (hot sun though!) and after we finish taking pictures at the site we have a drink and a look in the small museum with the original mosaics.

Back in Mykonos-town we have a relaxed lunch and then take a siesta in our hotel room. At night we have another drink in town. The next morning we walk to the museum of Mykonos town where we admire the big amphora with the oldest representation of the Trojan Horse in bas-relief. Then we take the bus to the ferry harbour and sail back to our lovely green and relaxed Samos. There the bus takes us to the garage and after paying the amount of €35 for the repairs we drive back home again.

The Thursday thereafter it is time for the 2nd heat of the 2nd year of the annual pétanque tournament at our place. Son X. of our neighbours G. and D. is absent this time so the Ladies Team convincingly wins again. Afterwards we grab a bite from the food everybody brought. The weather is so unusually nice for the beginning of September that neighbour K. gets into the swimming pool in the moonlight and I decide to do the same. Lovely!

The next day it is time to drive to the sushi bar at Pythagorion again since neighbour R. specifically wanted to go there again before he had to get back to work in Belgium in a few days time. This time American B., Tia, Amsterdam H. and her help Amanda and her daughter-in-law Maria and little Nefeli also join us. We order every dish from the menu, which pleases the staff. They bring us some extras as well. It all is really really delicious! Afterwards we have a cocktail at Makoula's in Balos since she is closing for the season within a few days.

Saturdays it is high time for a visit to the taverna of Mother and Son Nikos in Skouraiika where - to me - the souvlakis are the best of all. We have a little chat with Cindy from Boston. Back home in time.

In the meantime the small ants do not give up. When there is a tiny scrap of food spilled somewhere in the kitchen or at the dining table, they appear in large numbers to process it. When the door posts and window sills have all been taped close with silicone kit they shift towards the slits in the wooden ceiling to get to the kitchen. Which then also are closed with silicone kit.

Giannis the handyman appears and tries to reset the refrigerator. That does not work so we fall back to working with picnic cooling boxes and riding to and from the refrigerators and freezers from our neighbours. Then Giannis appears after some days with a professional mechanic who pumps extra cooling freon into the tubes which had leaked. For €80 the matter is settled. Good, it is rather unhandy not having a refrigerator nor a freezer in the house. More so while the weather still is very nice this first half of September. In daytime above 30°C in the shade and at night not below 20°C. The wind makes the difference between hot and nice. We still sleep under a mere sheet and only at night the ceiling fans are switched off. The water in the pool cools down by half a degree when it is windy; it is just „agreeable” when you are used to it.

Our neighbours leave for their homes in Western Europe one by one. And of course every goodbye has to be celebrated with a dinner in one of the local restaurants. They do prosper! One day we have an appointment with Vaso the pedicure who just came from Amsterdam H. in her hotel in Balos. She treats our feet very well, a delight. Since she is from Thessaloniki, we tell her about our plans to make a trip in Northern Greece at the beginning of October. To our astonishment she tells us that the ferry to Thessaloniki no longer sails because of long overdue payments. Oops, that does strike out our plans! We contemplate what to do next and have a look on the internet. There we find out that flying with Astra Airlines and renting a car for some 2 weeks even is cheaper than sailing with the ferry and bringing our own car. The decision is easy then and I start making reservations for the hotels en route.

One day F. quietly sits in the shade of the olive tree outside our bedroom with Tabby the tomcat sleeping at his feet. Cats Blacky and new competitor Red are at the Swiss neighbours C. and R. who always have some trays with special cat food standing ready. Suddenly Tabby jumps on all fours and creeps to a spot 15 metres behind the house. There he takes a big leap into the slope and comes out with a little whip snake in his mouth. He throws it into the air and starts playing with it like it were a mouse - which he does not fancy by the way. The snake wriggles in silent protest. F. watches it with his mouth hanging open but after a while decides to help the little snake to the other world. To which Tabby definitely does not agree. A few days before, early one morning we also found the feathers of a big hoopoo bird lying on the terrace with an innocent looking Tabby sitting next to it ...

Giannis the handyman drops by again to supply us with a new installation for the satellite tv. Since in its wisdom Canal Digital in the Netherlands recently has decided to broadcast most of the channels only in HD quality, we have had to buy new decoders (in the NL) for a start. And we also need a bigger dish - for this „HD” satellite is not directly above Greece - plus a new receiving head as well. The dish cannot be installed on the roof of the house anymore, but at the back of the yard on a slope. So one Friday Giannis starts making a big hole in the slope and then disappears without a word after having showed the pool to his son. Mondays he is back, pours concrete into a mould in the hole and leaves again. Well, we still have enough tv channels to watch

The second half of September the temperature lowers a little bit, during the day the maximum is 27°C in the shade. There is some wind so the water in the pool cools down. When it gets below 26°C it is too cold for me to get in. I also put the summer quilts back on our bed. We drive our Swiss neighbours C. and R. to the airport - their stay on Samos is over for this year. Afterwards F. meets with his „stamp man” in Pythagorion.

In the meanwhile the cats try to establish a new pecking order. Tabby is very kind to young Red, we suspect it might be a son of his who still is too young to pose a threat to his position. Genetically it is possible, we conclude after we read an article on fur colours and patterns. Blacky however lets out all his frustrations on his second position in the pecking order: he gets into a fierce fight with Red with a lot of screaming and big tufts of hair flying into the air. Well, they'll have to sort it out themselves ...

After a week Giannis reappears to continue working on the satellite tv; muttering under his breath about how the dish was sent to Patmos, returned to Athens and then finally sent to Samos. He gets everything into working order rather quickly, but as we check it later on it shows that he pointed the dish at the „old” satellite which does not send the HD-signals but

just the standard quality. Luckily he still has to come back with two HDMI cables which are supposed to be better.

We have dinner at G. and D. who prepared us a hearty spicy fish curry with the spices neighbour K. has left behind. Next Saturday we drive up to Skouraiika to have souvlakis at the tavern of Kostas the mayor, but not after Giannis appeared just to find out that one of the 2 HDMI cables does not fit into the tv in the bedroom which hangs too close to the wall. And off he is again!

We drive to Karlovassi with neighbour D. whose car broke down. We drop by Makris' office and he tells us that the papers for our house now are officially approved by the authorities. However he still does not have them on his desk but when we are back from our little holiday to Macedonia they most certainly will be! When we have coffee on the plateia Aris walks by with his daughter who join us. And so does his wife Katerina some time later who has taken their son Remos for his vaccinations. We all have a nice chat. The day afterwards we have dinner at Themos for the last time because he will close down when we are on our little trip to Northern Greece.

It is time to go shopping at the Lidl's again and this time I buy 3 big bags with apples. Since Ag'. Ioannis (the celebration of Saint John) is nearing and I really must stick to my promise to bake apple pie for everybody then. Spread out over 3 days, I peel 6 kilos of apples and make some 6 apple pies. The 26th at 8 in the morning we carefully drive down to the chapel in the valley below our house, the pieces of pie spread out on big trays. After an hour and a half of chanting and a honorary tour around the icon it is time for an elaborate breakfast. Everybody brought something, and much of the apple pies is eaten or taken home. Next year we will make sweet Limburger rice pie, we promise. We renew several acquaintances such as with retired Manolis from the CERN in Geneva. There is a lot of talking to do. The biggest news is that there is a new ferry connection Mykonos-Ikaria-Samos-Chios-Kaval coming winter.

F. talks to mayor Kostas for a while who reports that the last unpaved stretch of the road behind our house (400 m) will be asphaltised on private initiative. And so we also donate €50. In the afternoon clouds start covering the sky and in the evening we enjoy the spectacle of the distant lightning and rolling thunder behind the mountain. The heavy showers float past us until at 10 o'clock we get the full score. It just slams horizontally under the shelter and we and the remainder of the cushions get soaking wet. And, the kitchen and the bedroom roof start leaking again. We expertly rearrange the furniture and cover the floor with towels and old rags.

The next morning the temperature has at least dropped 10°C but inside it still is agreeable. We get to Votsalakia where the nearest ATM is to get some money and on the way back we ran in to retired Manolis and a friend. They invite us over for a drink after the siesta. From time to time there is a little shower. Manolis lives in a well kept house at the sea shore. He just uses a telephone cable for the internet (Cosmote, hopefully ADSL). We intend to find out how this cable exactly goes. In the evening we pick up neighbour D. and drive to the taverna of mother and son Nikos. We sit inside, not outside anymore. It is the last time for neighbours G. and D. so the air is filled with „Καλό χειμώνα!“ 's (Good winter!) when we leave.

The next Sunday we occupy ourselves with taking inside the garden furniture and other outside items; what we don't need anymore we directly put in the wooden cabin. After that

we pack our suitcases for our trip to Macedonia. And, to complete the week, Amsterdam J. (back in town) arrives to have a look at the problem with our roof. We do hope that we now can look forward to a winter without leakage and humidity in the house!

October 2014

We drive off to the airport at 5 o'clock in the morning after a good but short night of rest - only shortly disturbed by some fighting cats. An hour of flying gets us to Thessaloniki. We get into a very crowded bus downtown, where we get off real close to our hotel. The hotel is situated in a very charming area with a.o. a semi covered fish market, in the narrow streets between the buildings, and a flower market around an old Turkish hamam (public bathing house).

After checking in we stroll to the boulevard in the shining sun. At the White Tower I take some pictures in the midst of some remarkably well behaving Russians. We do like Thessaloniki; clean, nice to see, many Art Deco elements on the well kept apartment buildings of some 8 storeys high. Those were built by French architects after the big fire of 1917, it does look a bit like Paris. And there are real bicycle lanes, and not only the students ride a bike (100.000 students, the largest university of South Eastern Europe).

We have lunch and then take the sightseeing city bus which drives us past the sights in a little hour, including the city walls high up the hills surrounding the centre. We walk back to the hotel via the Agia Sophia church (7th century) and a monastery devoted to Agios Theodoras. We let our feet rest for a while in our room.

For dinner internet helps us find an Asiatic take-away where you can also sit. I have dumplings and sushi, F. savours Beijing Duck. In spite of the neon light surroundings it tastes delicious. We have an early night.

The next morning we get up well rested, although we have to stretch out our backs first, due to the hard matras. After breakfast we walk to the Archeological Museum. En route we see that the Agia Sophia is open now, so we step inside to have a look and take some pictures. The greater part of the morning we spend at the museum admiring the collection, and a sunny coffee break on the terrace. It is set up in a clear and nice way, and especially the collection of gold wreaths is impressive.

We walk back into town for lunch, Italian this time. Risotto with green asparagus for me and filet of seabream with roasted sweet peppers and couscous for F. After that I visit the Roman Forum and then back to the hotel for a rest. At 8 we have dinner close to the hotel, Cesar salad for me and a hamburger for F. Back at our room I play a little trick with the iPad so we can watch live Dutch television: Champions League - Nicosia Cyprus versus Ajax.

Wednesday after breakfast we walk to the bus stop for the bus to the airport. The bus is not so crowded but we still have to stand. There are no traffic jams however so we arrive at the airport after half an hour. We pick up our rental car; I choose one which is not so wide - a Volkswagen Golf, automatic gear.

We drive past Thessaloniki in a big curve eastward. Out in the country the traffic is very light. After a drive of one hour and a half - alongside a lake and later on the sea - we arrive at our hotel in Ofrynio. The little sea side resort with a big sand beach is already for 3/4 into hibernation.

We put our gear in our room and drive 10 km inland to Amphipolis. The Archeological Museum is built on the top of a hill amidst the remainders of the ancient city (of which

mostly only the foundations have remained) with the river the Strymon meandering around it. We have a look and then a sandwich at a little taverna across the road. After that we admire the 5 m high Lion of Amphipolis a little further on alongside the river. From there we see the activity of the excavations of a recently discovered tomb. The road however is so bad that we dare not take it with our „low” Golf. You can't get in anyway. We will follow the progress of the excavations via their website theamphipolistomb.com. Latest news is that the motechr of Alexander the Great, Olympia, is buried inside. Only 1/3 of the entrance to the tomb has been cleared away so far, so it will take a while before it will be known. The cleared rooms so far had been filled with sand, so the chances of grave robbery are considered low. And the big Lion will be put back on top of the hill if the works are finished.

We drive back to the hotel and have a rest. After that the lady of the hotel cooks us a nice meal. In our room we watch some recent Dutch television programs on the iPad and go to sleep.

The next day we leave this eastern part of Macedonia; we drive westward past Thessaloniki. After 2 hours we make a stop at Pella, the birthplace of Alexander the Great (350 BC). First we visit the museum, big and nice, with a couple of impressive mosaic floors and much golden jewelry from surrounding graves. Then we look around the ancient city, where some more, bigger mosaic floors are restored in their original houses. People are still busy working on further excavations. At the back of the site there are remainders of a bathing house with bath tubs in a communal room and drains still visible. At the museum shop I buy some booklets from two friendly ladies.

We move on to our hotel (Pella Hotel) in nearby Giannitsi. We have some fresh baked fish for lunch. For dinner we walk into town where men are watching the soccer games on tv from the terraces; PAOK Thessaloniki loses with 2 - 0 from Guimares Portugal.

Fridays we get up with clouds in the sky - first time. We drive South West through field with ripe cotton and apple orchards. The hotel manager tipped us to make a detour by Verginia, with the grave of Philippos II, the father of Alexander the Great, with the finds in a museum inside the big tumulus.

Verginia however has commercialised in an unpleasant way. First signs direct you to a parking where you have to pay - nowhere else parking is allowed (I do find a free parking space). Not in the genuine Greek chaotic way where everybody tries to park as close to the entrance as possible. Next the entrance fee is double of normal and finally you are not allowed to take pictures. I do wish there would be some EU-regulation where it is allowed in every public museum! A pity because the museum really has a nice collection with gold-plated cuirasses and beautiful jewelry. We just buy a booklet on it. Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great, is supposed to be buried here as well. Inside the tumulus you are led to the entrance door of the graves in semi-darkness. It gives you a good idea how it looked like in real.

We drive on to Velventos to the Vogiatzi Winery, a nice road with mountains on the one side and a lake deep down on the other side. For our 25th anniversary we got a few bottles of this winery and they were really delicious - especially the red Tsapournako. Alas, the winery is closed, but we can always buy this wine at the shop in Karlovassi from the Esperos man.

We arrive in the mountain village of Lechovo, more to the north, where we booked a room in a hotel. There everything is closed too but when I call their telephone number a friendly

lady soon arrives to open up. The central heating does not work yet but we can use the airco to heat the room. Because outside it is only 17°C with a light drizzle. The wifi works perfectly too.

We have dinner in one of the few tavernas which are still open. When we tell we are from Samos the owner immediately calls the pharmacist who is from Samos too (the hotel manager yesterday also had an uncle living in Vathy). The pharmacist arrives, he is from Karlovassi, and we chat for a while, about Samos and mutual acquaintances. When he retires he will definitely return to Samos, he only wound up here for work in this place (900 m alt) where the snow gets up to 2 m in winter time.

At night we here the rain on the roof from under our eiderdown. Outside temperature is 12°C when we get up, so we pull on our fleece sweaters. After breakfast we drive to Amyndeio where there is a big annual fair. We stroll round but it really is nothing special: cheap clothing, food stalls, garden gnomes and some small attractions like a big (...) wheel and a merry-go-round. And they also sell knit woollen underwear, like those itchy undershirts I was made to wear when I was a kid. We have a strong cappuccino at the local ζαχαροπλαστείο (combination of a patissier and a coffee house) and drive on to the Alpha Winery. After presenting the best regards from a Dutch wine merchant who visits the winery quit often, we get a special tour around the winery and at the end tast (tiny sips from) their wines. We buy some bottles which will be shipped to us via Maraki's taverna in Koumeika.

We have lunch in a restaurant which the wine merchant recommended us, a little further on, on the shore of a big lake. We start with quince and grilled soft cheese and snails in herb butter, then grilled trout from the lake and scampis saganaki (in a mild cream-tomato sauce with a dash of fresh dill). Delicious! It is served with a crispy round flat bread of which we take the remainder home for supper. We have siësta in the hotel where we are the only guests, nice and quiet, if not for the airco which sometimes moans like an old goat. In the evening we are not hungry nor thirsty so we do not come into action anymore.

Sundays we drive to Nymfaio, a mountain village at 1350 m on the flanks of the Mount Vernon (1750 m). The village was restored a number of years ago and now mainly lives on summer and winter mountain tourism. We want to visit the bear rescue centre Arkturos. After asking directions we drive around the village and move up the mountain. A very scenic route but all we discover is a group of houses which are tightly locked. It is misty and cold, 7.5°C, so we drive down again. In a nearby village we visit the wolf rescue centre, also run by Arkturos. The wolves do not show themselves, but the manager tells us that we looked for the bear rescue centre in the wrong place.

First we have lunch in another restaurant recommended by the wine merchant. Pumpkin soup, courgette from the oven with sun dried tomatoes and feta and a coarse pesto of grilled sweet peppers, and a nice steak and a grilled piece of smoked pork. Accompanied by a small bottle of Beaujolais like wine. Then we drive to Nymfaio for the second time, where we find the bear rescue centre amidst heavy fog and pouring rain. But 4 of the 10 bears show themselves, so we do not complain.

We dry in the hotel and get to sleep after a sandwich and an episode of „The Great Dutch Bake Off”.

Mondays we drive to Ioannina. En route we try two museums but they are closed, as always on Mondays. Especially a pity for the second one with fossiles from the petrified wood at the little village of Nostimo („tasty” in Greek). We want to have lunch in Grevena but

cannot find a parking place in the narrow streets of the centre, so we move on. The lady from the hotel in Lechovo had made us an elaborate breakfast this morning so we are not really hungry. When we move on to the highway the rain has gotten from falling to heavily pouring accompanied by a thick fog. We are glad there are some 30 tunnels in the stretch so we can breathe from time to time. In Ioannina we have to tackle a barred road to reach our hotel. We have a rest in our room while looking at the flashes from the thunderstorm through the windows. For dinner we drive downtown - it still rains. We are lucky and find a parking place near a Mexican restaurant for a hearty meal.

Tuesday morning we drive downtown again but no luck this time. We park the car just outside the centre and walk to the Archeological Museum which we enter just as it starts raining again. We take a leisurely stroll around the museum and watch the interesting videos on display. After that we have a coffee and walk to the walled „castle” on a peninsula at the lake. Different rulers all have added their imprint to the buildings, so now there is a restored Byzantine church standing next to an Ottoman mosque. I take some pictures in the continuously falling rain. We have a delayed - elaborate - lunch and return to the hotel at half past 5. There we notice that the sun is trying to break through.

The next morning we do not put on our sweaters - it is dry and it should get better. We do drive through low hanging fog but when we reach the end of a long tunnel we drive into a mountainous landscape in brilliant sunshine. We stop at Dodoni, where there used to be an oracle in the old days, just as in Delphi. People used to scratch their questions in lead strips and put it down at the foot of an oak tree, where according to tradition a dove had landed and announced that there was an oracle there. The omnipresent priests would interpret the sounds from the environment and other signs to formulate an answer.

The adjacent amphitheatre is big, and much people are at work at its restoration. As goes for the surrounding temples. We have coffee at a nearby kafeneion and then drive to the Zigorja mountain area north of Ioannina. This area in the Pindos mountain range is known for its characteristic old villages and bridges. We stop at the local information centre where a friendly lady points out all the interesting sights. With a whole bunch of leaflets we drive on to our hotel at Monodendri.

Our room is in traditional style with much wood, nice antique furniture and a fireplace. Only the shower is hyper modern with an elaborate touch screen panel and shower heads coming from all sides. And in one way or another we get the central heating to work. We have our meals in the hotel that day, not so much choicic but at least easy. I finish the day with a cup of hot cocoa, as it gets really cold at night.

The next day we make a large tour in the area, based on the leaflets from the information centre. The characteristic stone arch bridges are well conserved, nice to see. In Koukouli we visit a small museum where the late local school master has gathered some 3000 plants of the environment. We also try to walk to some of the bridges, but the signs do not say how far away they are. When we see nothing after 1/2 hour (downwards), we turn back. As there are many flowering cyclamen, colchicum and crocuses we do not mind the walk. We drive back to the hotel in a big circle, over better and worse roads, stopping at smaller and bigger old stone bridges. At one point a turtle sits in the middle of the road, enjoying the sunshine. After taking his picture we put him at the side of the road in the grass.

A little later we have to stop for a large herd of cows and some calves, lead by some men in pick-up vans. Probably they are on their way from the high mountain meadows to the

meadows in the valley for the winter. The grown cows all wear nicely sounding bells. The end of the herd is formed by a friendly young man with a very skinny dog and a fierce looking (breeding?) bull.

We have dinner in the restaurant across our hotel. There is no more trout so we pick something from the standard menu. As a nightcap we have coffee and a Metaxa (F.) and hot cocoa (me) in our hotel.

Fridays we slowly drive to Kastraki near Kalampaka under a nice sun. After some asking around we find our hotel, our balcony gives a splendid view of the Meteora rocks with the monasteries on top. It still is relatively busy with tourists, which means that some more restaurants still are open. We have lunch at the one next to our hotel, where they serve some more than souvlaki/biftecki/sausage/pork chop/chicken. The grilled veal liver tastes good. We admire one of the cats which arrive to beg for food. It is huge with really blue eyes. Its fur is spotted white. Well fed but it looks a bit goody-goody - probably because it is slightly cross-eyed. A mixture with a special breed, we think. I suddenly remember that the cat from the monastery on Patmos also was huge

I wake up a bit worn down from the night. First there was a couple of very noisy young Americans until 2 o'clock and then some toilet had a broken floater which caused it to reflush every two minutes with a lot of noise echoing through the pipes of the entire building..... But I seem to be the only one who was bothered.

After a good breakfast we drive up into the Meteora karst area. The road is well kept with plenty of parking space at view points on the monasteries and the landscape. The building of the monasteries started between 1450 and 1550, but in the 9th century there already were monks living in this special area - living in caves. Until the middle of the 20th century the monasteries could only be reached with rope ladders and big nets on pulleys. The monasteries themselves are very crowded with tourists coming from the entire world. We have a look inside one but as it is not allowed to take pictures we worm ourselves way out quickly.

We have lunch at Kalampake after a visit to the Lidl's (where there are kitchen scales on sale) and an ATM. The menu from the restaurant is standard, we are getting fed up with it by now. Back at the hotel I catch up with some sleep. At night we have a nightcap at the neighbouring restaurant and watch interland soccer on the tv: Finland vs. Greece. Good for our understanding of Greek.

We drive away from the hotel, with a detour around Mount Olympus, on the coastal road from Athens to Thessaloniki. The mountain is covered in clouds, in contrast to the rest of the landscape which lies in the sunshine. When we are nearly past it, we do however get a last glimpse on its peak. When we turn on to the highway we stop at the first roadside restaurant for a coffee. Which proves to be a good idea, since 4 kms later the highway changes into a smaller road through villages for a while. We have a big laugh at the Greek logic behind it. The two most busiest roads of the county (Athens - Patras and Athens-Thessaloniki) still are not ready as full highways, while between Corinth and Kalamata and between Igoumenitsa and Kavala near the Turkish border there are two brand new highways on which there is hardly any traffic.

Due to our common sense we are able to avoid the centre of Thessaloniki and take a big detour around it to reach our hotel near the airport. We squeeze the last drops of fuel into the

car and the next morning we park it at the airport at a quarter past four, with 1650 kms behind its wheels.

When we arrive home after our holiday Tabby faithfully awaits us - in spite of being pampered by neighbour L. as she texted us. That same evening we have a welcome/goodbye dinner with our παρέα at Kyriakos who put himself out with the food. The latest gossips are exchanged. The next day we drive to Karlovassi where we are notified that the paperwork from our house still is okayed but no real paper has yet arrived on the desk of the architect nor the lawyer. We give the regards of the pharmacist of Lechovo to the lawyer, they both went to the same school.

A courier calls, he had taken the wine package to Maraki's but she was closed. We agree that he takes it to the other taverna and he promises to be on his way immediately. When we have a look an hour later, it shows that we have reckoned with the Dutch „immeditely” and not with the Greek one. It has not arrived yet, so to say. Giannis drops by to install a second HDMI cable for our bedroom tv. However he is not able to grab the reception of the HD-sattelite, no matter how hard he tries. It must be something with our subscription, we conclude. To be continued at the end of January.

The next day we drive to Koumeika for the wine, again. Still nothing is known. I call the courier and he tells that he delivered it at the third taverna on the plateia. And indeed, there it is. In the meanwhile we have started with the autumn works. F. puts another layer of paint on the wooden cabin. I paint the columns of the gate white, for we have seen some nice ornaments from the „concrete shop” near Platanos which we want to put on top. There we also saw some table-legs which we might use to make a marble table outside on the terrace, something we have always wanted. But first we have to take good measures of everything. Amanda's Giannis drops by to work on the roof. He puts a thick layer os silicone kit on the leaking spots on the roof. Next week he will be back to paint it again. And then we wait for the rains

The weather stays good, with maxima of about 27°C in the shade. And, for the first time in 5 years of our stay here in the house, we see, while sipping coffee on the terrace, dolphins jumping out of the water in the bay in front of us. Great!!

At the end of October a cold wind comes from the North-West, autumn is finally getting its grip on the weather. Newyork/Greek B. invites us over to her house in Koumeika to help eat the rests of the food. Like we don't get the leftovers from the leaving neighbours

Anyway it is a nice evening, our neighbour D., German dentist R. and his wife the docter S. attending too. We chat until midnight after which we get quickly under our eiderdown.

The one but last week we drop by Makris the architect's office and guess what? The official legalisation papers of our house had arrived! But, it needs another stamp from another authority and only after that it is completely done. In the meanwhile however we can collect a password from the municipality hall for the property tax declaration. There, it takes some time before we have handled that. First, of course there is someone not waiting her turn and bluntly pushing past us, and second, it is noticed that the F.'s ID number on which the social security number is based, has changed (sure, his ID card has long expired). The matter is settled and we get a print of the password, a sort of digital code. This we take to the accountant in Marathokampos, where we are welcomed and subsequently told

that I also need one! Nobody had thought to tell us that

So next day we drive to Karlovassi

again and visit the municipal hall to arrange it. But then it shows that back in 2008 when I applied for an AFM-number, it was incorrectly set that my tax residence country is Greece (not for F. by the way). To correct that I need a „tax residence declaration” from the Dutch Tax Bureau, which then has to be translated into Greek. We meet our lawyer in his office and authorise him to handle the matter, after he receives this „tax residence declaration” from me sent from the Netherlands. To be continued We also authorise him again to give another try at getting back our twice paid road tax for 2014, and ask him to pay our road tax for 2015 coming December too.

A depression nears Samos, after a last sunny day of 25°C (in the shade!). Before it reaches the island I put the seedlings of the summer into the full ground of our vegetable garden. Rosemary, apple sage, marjory, basil-tree, hazelnut, parsley and some cuts from neighbour R.: Tradescantia, an easy growing garden plant. The cuts from Samiotic oregano, mint and savory did not succeed so I'll have to give it another try next season. The following night the rain pours down on them, and it also seems that our roof has been properly sealed this time. Only a tiny spot in the living looks like it is leaking a little bit of rain.

Giannis (from Rodopi) drops by and tells us that he is divorced, I already suspected it. He also mentions that there is a need for more money to bituminise the whole unpaved stretch of „our” road (800m). So we donate some more money on which he immediately calls mayor Kostas who thanks us elaborately. Later we see that a small stretch is done, but not nearly a quarter of the total. Also a curve has been solidified.

The last Saturday we go to mayor Kostas taverna for souvlakis with neighbours R. and D. After that we are invited at Jacobo and Darina's, Thanassis' nephew and his Bulgarian wife who got married a couple of years ago and now already have two children. It's Jacobo's birthday and we squeeze in between Greek friends, and are made to eat a piece of goat from the oven. When we leave, we get a big bag of freshly picked almonds. A few nights I busy myself with cracking them, to take with us back to the NL.

After the rain the weather gets better and in the sunshine I pluck the weeds which have started to show their green leaves above the ground. Especially dandelions and thistles meet my frenzy to expel them. The path behind the wooden cabin is already covered with small green seedlings. It is too much to take them all out by hand, the time left being too little. It'll have to wait until January. I also put a large amount of flower bulbs into the ground. We'll see what it will be like next year. In the meanwhile F. hacks out a small ditch in the curve of the entrance road, in which we put the watering hose for the fig tree. It is covered with grit and sand.

To finish the last remains of our food we invite neighbours R. and D. for a dinner, which turns out very nice. My recipes are inspired by the cookbooks of Ottolenghi. We open a good bottle of wine out of our shipment from Macedonia and finish with a glass of 30 year old Greek cognac.

At the nick of time Amanda's Gianni drops by to paint the roof, and also works on the last small leaking spot. His price is only 13 of what Thanassis charged us for some years while he tried to stop the leaking - in vain. We hand Gianni the key of our house and of the gate and ask him to keep an eye on things. I spray the olive trees around the spot with the fungus, a solution of some copper compound. F. puts all the garden furniture inside.

The last thing we do is have dinner at Ormos with neighbours R. and D. We treat Tabby on the leftovers of the chicken and the fish when we get home. The last day of October, early in

the morning, we drive to the airport where neighbour R. takes over the wheel to drive himself and his wife D. to the airport later that afternoon. We meet again in Athens, where we get our car key back. We chat some to kill the time until finally, in the evening, we fly to Amsterdam. Around midnight we are in bed in a hotel near the airport. The shuttle bus takes us back to the airport the next morning, where, after some chaotic times with broken down trains, we get into a train to the South with not too much delay. Just before 1 o'clock in the afternoon we put the key in the lock of the front door of our house over there.