

DREAMHOUSE IN GREECE 8 - 2015

January 2015

On January 6th it has been very cold on Samos. Officially -5°C but it seems it felt like -12°C due to an icy northern wind. Snow on the Kerkis and the Karvounis. Many water pipes have cracked; Amanda had a look in our house but there luckily everything seems to be okay.

At the end of January we fly to Samos with only half an hour delay due to the defrosting of the airplane wings on icy Schiphol. When we land on Samos it is half sunny at 20°C . After a round of shopping we are at our house around half past 6. We turn on the heaters to get rid of the dampness in the house. So to see no more leakage of the roof. When we turn in it starts to rain.

The next day it is dry again so I put on my hiking boots to have a look at the wild plants. Little Erodium flowers as does the lovely little purple Romulea. On the rocks at the sea shore the mandrake also flowers. At Stamatis' olive grove I see the first giant orchids flowering (*Barlia robertiana*). I do not find the yellow-brown *Ophrys sitiaca*, but I do see a lot of green leaf rosettes of orchids. The temperature is nice, even warm when the sun shines through holes in the clouds. I decide to make another tour at the end of our stay.

In the afternoon we drive to the houses of neighbours R. and D. to have a look around. When we stop to take a picture of the new built construction under their house on Thanassis; piece of land Thanassis himself suddenly drives past us. We greet him embarrassedly, but he does not greet us in return. It does seem like a very luxury stable, as it is officially called. There is only been a little water which has rained under the door at R. and D.'s house. We put the cover back on H.'s car which has been blown off. Behind it is the only *Ficus* which has survived the cold; mine's and neighbours C. and R.'s have died. Just like the geraniums but those have started to form new leaves again. When we are back it starts to rain again and at night there is some heavy downpour. But our roof stands strong! We do notice however that the walls are very humid; they really need a new layer of coating on the outside at the end of this summer.

Sunday morning we do some odd works and then drive to Chrisopetro's at Votsalakia for a nice Sunday lunch. The young mistress of the place tells us that you can order furniture from Ikea in Athens via the internet; shipping is only about 8 euros. Interesting On the way back we notice that the almond trees also did not survive the frost of the 6th; they look really dead, just like the one on the plot of D. and L. behind us. We visit Amsterdam H. to have a chat-up. It stays rainy and during the night more showers pour down with a bit of thunder now and then.

The Monday morning we do some more odd jobs in the house due to the rain. In the afternoon it clears so we move our activity to the yard, very relaxedly. I count the orchid rosettes on our premises; double of last year. I mark them with circles of little stones so we do not step or drive on them. Apart from the frozen-to-death *Ficus* and geraniums the marjory, sage, and rosemary have survived, of the oregano I am not sure. Around half past 4 the temperature really is agreeable so we get the garden chairs out on the terrace and watch the sun set with an aperitive at hand. We admire

the nice colours of the sky after that but then get inside because the temperature drops quickly.

In the evening it gets overcast again and we have another night with heavy showers which continue the next Tuesday. We do some business in Karlovassi and have our hair cut at Maria's. We run into Kyriakos of the Cypriot restaurant "Stella" in Balos. Architect Maris ensures us that the permits for our house now are definitely in order; in April we can drop by to pick up a set of xeroxes of all the paperwork. On the way back we see, for the first time in all those years, water from Skouraike uphill flows through the dry river bed alongside the road to our house, to the sea. When it gets dry for a little while, I drive up to the house of neighbours C. and R. to pick a bucket full of lemons to preserve. They got many this year, when I am finished picking half of them still remain in the tree. We only got 4 in our tree, I add some fertiliser grains on the soil around the trunk, for at the neighbours the new flower buds already have started to grow.

At night we have dinner with H. and some friends of her visiting, at Karlovassi in the old part behind the supermarket at the sea. I have a thick winter soup with big meat balls in it.

Wednesday is the next rainy day so some more inside works. The grumpy old man stops at our gate and hands us a bag with oranges and lemons. The lemons I preserve in salt together with C. and R.'s.

During the night and the next morning the rains get even more heavy, at some point I think I hear a shower of hail coming down. When the sea is visible the next morning it is reddish brown at the shore side; much clay has washed down from the hills. When the rains ease down a bit I get out for a bit of fresh air. I hear a loud noise - a large waterfall cascades down the lower entrance road of D. and L.'s plot of land behind us.

Fridays we take a ride to Pythagorion and Vathi. The unpaved stretch of road near our house has changed into a mixture of deep furrows and heaps of big stones, formed by the downpour of water from the hills to the sea. At Mayor Kostas' house a part of the road has been washed away. With care we balance on to the paved road again. F. sometimes has to get out to remove rocks and waste (backside of a refrigerator, part of a car). In the low corner of the road the water pours over the (lopsided) road with such force that we decide to turn around. Through pools and mud we drive up to Skouraiika and from there on to Vathi. On the boulevard an even bigger piece of the parking area is being renovated so we are barely able to find a parking place. We walk to the OTE from which we return with the usual "Greek" feeling. First the young lady wants to sell us an expensive subscription for internet and telephone together - totally ignorant of the cheaper internet-only offer at the OTE website. Then she cannot tell us how much the extension of the telephone/ADSL cable to our house might cost, that can only be calculated after we take a subscription. Really! Via the Lidl's we drive to Pythagorion where our favourite coffee bar also is being renovated and Robinson's for a pitta is closed. We return home after a short visit to E. and R.'s house in Koumaradei which is closed too.

At night we dine again with H. and her friends, which have moved out of their hotel as the entrance road had turned into a strong flowing river. They now stay at the

mother's of H.'s help Amanda. Who from her part has declared that these are the worst rains since 1993. We eat at Azurro's in Karlovassi, across the tanner's museum at the sea. Modern, good food, but not cheap by Greek standards. When we drive home it again starts to pour down. I am concerned with the road condition and the mud and pools up at Skouraiika, but the south side of the island has not had that last cloudburst. Our jeep safely brings us home. Where the electricity only works at a very low rate, so we decide not to use the electric blankets before we creep in. Next Saturday the power is back at full force, luckily.

Saturday night we decide to have a look at Mayor Kostas' taverna, where we are warmly welcomed by the locals. We have some souvlaki's and treat everybody on a drink, to do something in return for all the drinks we are offered during summer. Kostas reports that coming Monday the roads are being repaired. Jacobo and his Bulgarian wife drop by, the youngest one now walking steadily. Jacobo's young sister still has 1 1/2 month to go before her baby is due. We talk on the almond trees, and it shows that we are wrong. It was not last year that they flowered in the beginning of January, but the year before, at the end of February. We are assured that the flower buds are already starting to grow on the trees. Good!

Sunday there is wind but it stays dry. It is not too cold so I weed the vegetable garden. Monday is the same but then we notice that due to the humidity and the heating of the house mould starts to grow on the inside of the soaking wet walls. it really has to be worked on coming summer!

Mayor Kostas keeps to his promise: a big shovel arrives and shovels away the stones and the mud on the road below our house. Then it drives up to Skouraiika. The afternoon we work outside, as we do the next Tuesday. F. paints the entrance gate as the grumpy old man stops again and hands him another bag of lemons and oranges. And a piece of broccoli, which is eaten that same evening. F. squeezes the oranges into a big bottle of juice and I make jam out of the lemons after the failure of trying to caramelize slices in the oven. The jam however does not gel as much as promised in the recipe. Nice on the yoghurt though.

Our last Wednesday starts with another downpour. I am displeased as I see the moulds on the walls growing.

Thursdays when we wake up the sun shines. I put on my hiking boots and continue my quest for the *Ophrys sitiaca*. Underway I notice that considerable parts of the hills are washed away by the rain. And finally, just only 100 metres from our entrance road, I find the little bugger! It really makes my day. The 28th species of orchid I can add to my book. When I walk on I see our neighbour Manolis driving up in his 4WD. He only arrived yesterday. We'll see each other in April again. The road to Pevkos has been repaired for the greater part; the river on the paved part has been reduced considerably. I want to collect some flat round stones from the beach but the road to the beach has become the "river" now. Back home Tabby finally showed up. F. feeds him on all kind of treats. We have coffee outside in the sunshine and after lunch I continue my never ending battle against dandelions and thistles. Tabby oversees it all, lying on the soft cushion in the garden chair.

At the end of the afternoon we drive to H. to say goodbye. When we drive back through Koumeika (post box empty as usual), we see Aris getting out of a car. We

chat, all is well. His dog Max appears to be female and now has a litter of puppies We also do another check on the houses of R. and D. (plate torn away from the lower window) and G. and D. (corner of the plate from the kitchen window bent by the rain).

Then it is time to pack and clear up the house. Fridays we drive to the airport in the early morning hours. When we get into the plane we meet Themis of the Balos restaurant, who is headed for a big fair on the hotel and catering industry. He complains about the new Syriza government which according to him promised the Greeks so much which it can't make true I realise we have seen all our Greek friends.

Without any further ado we arrive in a Siberian Maastricht.

April 2015

It snowed on Samos in the second half of February, we learn from pictures sent by our neighbours D. and L. We do hope spring will really start when we fly down for our 3-month's stay on April 1st. Again, we combine our trip to Schiphol with a nice exhibition in Amsterdam: Rembrandt in his Late Period.

So after a short sniff of spring we board the train to Amsterdam on the last day of March. We arrive at Schiphol after a ride through a rainy and windy landscape and put our luggage in the lockers. We get to Amsterdam for our second dose of culture within a few days (the Sunday before we visited "Van Gogh in the Borinage" at Mons, Belgium).

We arrive at the Rijksmuseum a bit early so we have a tasty lunch at the Museum Café opposite the entrance, we were lucky to get a table. When we get into the museum at our reserved time-frame it is very busy. So that we cannot connect to the internet for an explication of the paintings and sketches via the app. Fortunately there are signs next to the displays. After one hour and a half we leave the museum as richer persons.

After a Belgium beer and a Peruvian meal we get back to Schiphol where we watch some soccer and hang around until it is time to check in. After some more hanging around in Athens we arrive on Samos right on time. After a round of shopping we arrive home at 9 in the evening. We turn in early, after finding out that the internet, the tv and the freezer don't work.

The next morning it shows that the freezer does work and the internet a little bit, so in a slightly better mood I take my camera and make my "orchid-round". I find a lot and even some 2 new species so my mood gets even better. I return at the end of the morning to find that retired Manolis has dropped by to say hello.

The rest of the afternoon we spend outside in the sunshine, getting the garden furniture and tools outside. We open all the windows to get some fresh air in - and some dampness out. For dinner I plan to cook some mussels but when I open the box a filthy smell comes out. Rotten, hell! So we have souvlakis instead.

The next day is sunny so I can wash all the bedlinen. F. scratches the mold from the walls and after a very big tour of vacuum cleaning the house looks okay again. Giannis from Amanda drops by so we can talk about the jobs to be done around the house (swimmingpool, damp walls etc.) In the afternoon the alarm from the solar

panel park above us starts going off with some 5 minute intervals, must be broke. We take the shortcut, the unpaved road to Amsterdam H. in Balos, where we chat away part of the late afternoon. Then we have a look in our postbox in Koumeika - empty as usual. In "The Stable" under neighbours R. and D.'s house there is quite some activity, a roof is constructed. During the evening and the night the alarm of the solar park sounds some few more times.

So I start the new day by sending a text message to Aris, who immediately takes his moped to drive over and switch it off. Then Giannis and his help arrive and start scrubbing off the old paint of the swimming pool - the weather forecast is favorable for painting. I do some more laundry and give the bathroom a thorough spring cleaning. Because of all the mold and dampness it takes a while before it sparkles and shines again. I have a rest in a garden chair on the terrace - in the sunshine.

When we change to go and have souvlakis at the taverna of Nikos and his mother, Manolis calls and shows up with his female friend after some minutes. We have a glass of wine and then drive up to Skouraiika. In the taverna there is nothing much going on but when we arrive a whole meal is brought to us - ut of nowhere it seems.

Sunday Giannis shows up again and starts painting the swimming pool. He also found someone who can fix the broken lamp. The work is done around lunchtime, and we drive to Chrisopetro where we are advised to eat a nice fish - it is the Sunday before Easter after all, the day of the Ressurrection of Lazarus. You are supposed to eat fish then - somme googling learns us that after Jesus revived Lazarus, Lazarus' sister did not believe he really was alive again. And then Jesus said to her: Look at him. He is eating a fish. A mere spirit cannot eat fish!

When we drive back on the unpaved road from Balos to Pevkos we see some lovely small blue irises flowering at the beginning of the entrance road of neighbours R. and D. - a new species. And some more orchid species which I had not seen before over there on a rocky stretch (*Orchis anatolica*). Across Thanassis pig stable I also find a rare *Ophrys bremifera* which is noticed by the curious tame and wild piglets.

The Big Week before Easter we start with shopping in Karlovassi. At the young man of the Agricultural High School we get some garden stuff as he proudly shows us some pictures of his firstborn - a girl. In Karlovassi we drop by Makris and the lawyer to work on my flywheel theory (you have to give them a boost from time to time to keep them rotating for another while). We visit the butcher for some nice hamburgers and beefsteak and after some searching we find the Germanos store where we might get some information on how to get a cable connection for ADSL internet. But it is very busy so we walk out again, where it has started raining. We drive back home where we spend the afternoon reading a book near the stove - it is cold and raining. I aslo try to download the HD-channels of the Dutch and Flemish television on our receiver but even after I updated the software it does not come through.

In the evening the rain has changed into pouring, but the next morning the sun shines. I give the kitchen oven a big cleaning, after which I bake an apple pie. In the afternoon I continue my battle against the dandy lions and thistles. The afernoon the man for the swimming pool lamp comes back with a new one and installs it. He tells us he is the one who made the electric system in our house. It is unusual cold that day

and the next few ones, with Thursday not more than 9°C max. There is an icy wind from the North, so we stay inside and spend the time with odd jobs and hobbies. One night we go over to Manolis where Anna cooks us some risotto - with my apple pie as desert. We chat until midnight.

At the end of the afternoon of Good Friday, after the new dishwasher has been delivered, the wind finally lies down and on the terrace, in a thick vest, we watch the sun set. Though Saturdays the wind still is too cold to work outside - another day for odd jobs inside. Around 5 we drive over to Ormos where we are supposed to meet with orchid hunters J. and L. from Drenthe in the north of the NL. We chat, eat and after that they follow us to our house where they spent the night on our premises in their VW-camper.

Next Sunday, Easter, we walk around some olive groves to spot orchids. After that J. and L. leave for Vathi. F. fills the pool, the paint must not dry out too much. I kill some more dandylicons and thistles, with the Easter fireworks of Marathokampos in the background - mostly smoke and loud bangs. The solar panel park across the road is not well maintained - it is filled with big bunches of flowering dandylicons. Which does not make me optimistic for next year's gardening works.

The photo workshop on orchids is cancelled, unfortunately, so we only drive to the west late in the afternoon. First we drop by at R.'s in Koumaradei, to have a chat. E. will only arrive on the 4th of May with their dog. After that we drive to the Lidl's which is already closed (Easter Monday?). We have a cappuccino on the square in Vathi, next to the statue of the lion. Which seems to be a replica of the lion guarding the tomb in Amfipolis in Macedonia which we visited last October. After that we walk to the Samos Hotel where there is no such thing as early registration for the congress but instead we get to know some people which I know for posting pictures on orchids on FaceBook, like English Sally and her husband Neil, Giorgos, and Nikos. We drive home not too late.

Tuesday the conference really starts. People from all over the world are present. A woman from Moskou, the director of the Museum of Natural History, gives a lecture on Russian orchids which is almost unintelligible. Though during lunch we have a really nice conversation with her - in spite of the fact that you would spontaneously lend her a dime to have a decent haircut. The lectures vary from quite interesting to boringly dull, and from well-presented to non-understandable due to heavy accents or bad articulation. We silently laugh about the everlasting battle between the morphologists (who divide orchids into species based on their form) and the genetists (who do so based on the DNA).

Thursday is excursion day. Badly organised, the Greek way, but eventually two busses leave in different directions. F. is in one bus, I follow the other one with our own car. So F. and I will visit different spots where orchids are located. The weather is really nice and we find a lot of orchids. To my utter joy we find the rare *Orchis anthropophora*, the "puppet orchid" when you translate the Dutch name into English. It is found by an enthusiastic young man from Czechia. At Spartharei I drive up the mountain with German Monika, a die-hard morphologist, who however knows very very much about orchids and shows up to be a lovely person. We want to drive on to

the top of the Bournias but the road is too bad, even for a jeep, after last winter's rains.

When we are done on our hot-spots I drive over to Limnionas where F. and his group will catch up with their bus. The couple from Drenthe is in charge of this excursion, together with a prof from Switzerland, and they really walk a long way to show all the spots. It is already getting late when the group finally shows up at the end of the mountain gorge at the edge of the sea, slightly dried out. The Drenths want the group to get into the bus immediately. But they have not reckoned with the French professor of the Natural History Museum in Paris. First he surprised everybody this morning by not appearing in his usual 3 piece suit but in a Hawaii shirt, bermudas and straw hat, and now he marches decidedly to the sea, taking off his upper clothes on the way, and diving into the water. Some others follow him into the relatively cold water. Drenth J. stands on the beach calling him to get out of the water, in vain. We have a quiet laugh about this nice Frenchman, with his charming accent when he speaks English. We drive on to Chrispetros for a meal, together with a Chilean and a French PhD-student, who wanted to have a swim too. It is only a short ride home after that.

On the last day of the congress, a lady from Nepal gives an interesting lecture. The day before, during the meal, we had a nice conversation with this intelligent modern woman and her well-educated teenager son. She works at an educational project to teach the locals to use her cloned orchids to grow them for medicinal purpose. Instead of getting them out of the wild nature and depleting it in that way. Next year she organises a congress on that subject in Nepal, an interesting idea to combine it with a holiday

The farewell dinner is in a restaurant in Pythagorion, including a show with traditional Samiotic dances. The French professor is the first to join in, together with a female, blond Czech PhD-student. They even get F. to dance (and a stiff German professor, if not for only a short moment). To everybody's surprise, the Russian lady cannot get enough of the dancing. We order a bottle of Korfes and let André (the French professor) have a taste - the standard wine is awful. The food is quite tasty however. At midnight the party is not yet done but we drive home.

Saturdays we sleep until late and hang around the house. At night we drive to Kostas the mayor's tavern to eat souvlakis. I try to get ahead in the matter of our unregistered water meter but he only reacts with a shrug of his shoulders. When we get back to our house I drive over a big rock. The next morning we see that one of the tyres is completely flat! So we open the service book of the car and for the first time in our lives we change a tyre.

Mondays we drive to the garage to deliver the torn tyre but our tyres are not in stock. So we have to avoid unpaved roads for a while then. In Karlovassi we buy some adaptor pieces to connect both the laundry machine and the dishwasher to one water supply and one drain. But after some efforts F. still can't get them connected without leaking. So we call plumber Dimitris for assistance. We do succeed however in fixing one of the two pine cone ornaments onto the pillars of our gate, it looks very nice. I weed the vegetable garden in the meantime and plant and sow some veggies and flowers. Also the swimming pool gets its first cleaning.

The arrival of our Flemish neighbours approaches so we pick up some keys here and there and hand them to Katrina to do some cleaning. When we are at the house of neighbours R. and D. I notice much plaster on their stairs and when I have a look in their bedroom I see that a stone of the wall has come down, bursting into pieces on the floor. Amanda's Giannis promises to come and have a look and repair it.

We visit retired Manolis to admire his vineyard. F. gets so impressed that he immediately knows a spot on our land where he may start one too after it has been ploughed. Thursdays Mayor Kostas suddenly drops by to wish us a happy Agios Giorgos, St. George, the patron saint of Skouraiika. He also brings us a bowl of traditional "porridge", a little cabbage, greens and some 14 eggs. I decide to bake a cake with some of the eggs.

Fridays I call the garage where they tell us that our wheel with the flat tyre has been renewed and is waiting for us. When we want to leave the battery of the car suddenly decides it has been enough after 6 years and refuses to start the car. Retired Manolis helps us out with his car and our starting cables so we directly drive to the garage to collect the wheel and get a new battery as well. En route we get a word out to Kostas of the Agricultural University that we will come and collect the new strimmer the next day. After that we return to Karlovassi where we finally (!) get the legalisation papers of our house, decorated with impressive stamps. After a shopping round at the Lidl's we drive to the direction of Spartharei, where we take pictures of a lonely beautiful *Ophrys reinholdii*.

So that next Saturday we collect the strimmer and start cutting the weeds and grass around our entrance road and house. In the evening we have souvlaki's at Kostas the Mayor, hand him a piece of the cake and complain about the absence of garbage collection. It seems the salaries haven't been paid for a while again Maybe next Monday, he promises. Sunday we continue cutting the grass, until I wind up holding the starting rope in my hand ... broken off. We decide on other odd jobs for the rest of the day.

Monday we drop the strimmer at Kostas again and drive on to Kokkari, where we have an appointment with the Drent orchid experts J. and L. We cross the wooded hills of the Karvounis for wood orchids but only find one species, all be it a very pretty one. In the evening we collect neighbours H. and J. from the airport and drive home.

Tuesday neighbour H. borrows our car to drive to Vathi to pay the tax for his car again, I use their laundry machine because plumber Dimitris has called that he can only come to connect the dishwasher and laundry machine that evening. When he shows up, he finds out that he needs some pieces that have to come from Karlovassi. So F. still has to do the dishes for a while.

Wednesdays and Thursdays (after we finally see the garbage van passing (and emptying) the containers) we spend with the Drent orchid experts since they leave some Sunday and we try to learn as much from them as possible. We also pay our respects to the accountant in Marathokampos, who "only" needs our client number of the electricity to submit our tax papers for the house. We also collect the repaired strimmer. Next morning we try it but since the engine still is cold it takes a long time before it starts, leaving me with a large blister. After it works again we finish the

cutting of the grass and weeds and prepare ourselves for the celebration of the 1st of May.

May 2015

As mentioned before, the 1st of May always is a day of celebration and joy. We have an elaborate lunch at Themis in Balos with neighbours H. and J. Just as we are about to leave the house neighbours Y. and N. drop by to say hello. So we chat with them for a short while. We also assist H. and J. to pay Katrina and Giorgos for cleaning their house and discussing new odd jobs.

The weather is really nice and we enjoy the lunch, the view over the sea and the seeing of old friends like Tia from the hotel, Maki the municipal secretary, Kostas from the agricultural shop with parents, wife and baby and Dimitris the plumber with his beautiful girlfriend. It is late in the afternoon when we return home, where we watch the sunset on the terrace a couple of hours later.

As the garden is finished for now, I start the next day with some work around the house. The blinds get a thorough cleaning and the terrace gets a good sweeping.

Sundays I make my usual orchid-round but this time not to take pictures but to collect seed. Whether the wind disperses it or I, it will not harm the plants. I am able to get the dried-out flowers of most of the species which grow in our area. Only the little samiotissa hasn't finished flowering yet, I'll have to come back in two weeks. Retired Manolis drops by for a chat and neighbours Y. and N. stop in their little rental car to say goodbye. To F.'s enjoyment Dimitris drops by later in the afternoon to connect the new dishwasher.

Mondays I give the windows a big cleaning. In the distance I hear the first charter of Air Berlin arriving. A few hours later a little yellow rental car crosses the roads around our house with an alarming speed. It tries to turn around with much noise of the engine and finally it stops. An agitated young German man asks us where he is because his car broke down. He rented it at the airport and immediately drove away, without any road map or driving directions, together with his friend on their way to a hotel in Votsalakia. He also does not know the international telephone code for Greece when he tries to call the rental agency. We give them a bottle of water and some time later we hear that the car is being taken away

Tuesdays we make a trip with neighbours H. and J. First to Karlovassi where to our astonishment the hair shop of Maria is closed. She doesn't answer the phone either

After a frappé on the old plateia we drive to Kokkari where we have lunch, and after that to a new place at the beach of Potokaki for a drink. Last stop for the day is in Koumeika at the tavern of the now 87-year old Maraki where we meet with Aris and his children. At half past 7 we are home, to find a naval cruiser laying in our bay. I quickly take a few snapshots. Not much later about 8 zodiacs come racing from the coast to the vessel where they are hauled aboard in the nightfall. It appears that in Pevkos there is a certain Manolis the postman whose son is a high ranking marine officer and sometimes he drops by to say hello to Dad. In the darkness the ship floats away to the north, the next morning it is gone.

Wednesday and Thursday we spend on some odd jobs around the house. I thin out the seedlings and let the wind spread out the pulverised orchid flowers and -seeds

alongside the entrance road, in the olive grove and around the house. I do read however that it takes at least 2 years before you can see anything like orchid leaves growing. Ah, patience is a virtue! As the temperature is relatively high, I try the swimming pool. But that is a cold exercise. The thermometer says 27°C but that reakky isn't true - it was a very cheap one. Fridays it is time to pick up our neighbours R. and D. from the airport, with a short stop at R. and E.'s, who has also arrived. We have welcoming dinner at Themos', who, to our astonishment, surprises us with 3 big crayfishes.

Saturdays Aris drops by like old times for a beer. He tells that the heavy thunderstorm in March that damaged R. and D.'s house, also damaged a house nearby. In the evening, when we drive up to Skouraiika to have souvlakis in Mayor Kostas' taverna, it is difficult to find a parking place, all is full. In the church there is a wedding going on, I have a peek around the corner. Everybody in their Sunday best clothes, the little bridesmaids look like angels. Afterwards the pope drops in for a coffee, his wife comes up to me for a talk. The wind has become very strong so I am glad I brought my shawl for the walk back to the car. As neighbours R. and D. do not have electricity nor water Sundays we also have a dinner together, this time at the Cypriotic restaurant Stelle where Kyriakos treats us on some very nice dishes.

Mondays we digest al those dinners, quietly at home, and Tuesday too. Neighbours D. and L. have arrived so we drive up to say hello at the end of the afternoon. The clouds that have been hanging around for a few days finally decide to empty their contents so we enjoy a mild shower with some lightning. Everything smells fresh again. Wednesday we find out that hairdresser Maria is back from a week at her mother's in Thessaloniki so we drive up, together with neighbours H. and J. to have our hair cut. When we are done I hear a thud from the street and I see that a moped, driving on the wrong side of the road, has been smashed against our car by another car driving up. After a lot of swearing the other car backs out and the moped drives away. I see two big scratches on the back door of our car and angrily ask the driver of the other car who is going to pay for that. He points at the moped in the distance, gets into his car and speeds away too. !!##@@!! I feel screwed in an enormous way. For lunch again we try the new Italian restaurant in Kokkari but it is only open for dinner. So we have lunch at Manolates.

Thursdays and Fridays I keep myself busy with the everlasting battle against the dandelions and thistles, and with clearing the path behind the wooden cabin (the Els Path). It has gradually turned into shorts-and-tops-weather during the day, so I have to apply sun screen oil. In the evenings it is nice outside but you still need a vest or sweater.

Sunday evening we drive op to Esperos in Balos where H. celebrates het 70th birthday. We meet a lot of old friends, half the village of Koumeika is invited too. For birthday present H. has made a gift pot for the fire brigade so everybody can donate. At midnight a big birthday cake is brought in and we all sing "Happy Birthday". After that we drive home.

Mondays we pick up brother-in-law A. from the airport, but first we wanted to do some shopping so we leave early. At the airport is is very busy with leaving and

arriving of passengers and coaches to bring them to their destinations. When we have picked up A. we drive to Pythagorion to have coffee. When we walk back to the car we ran into H., J, and D. who bring R. to the airport. So we turn around and have another cappuccino. We drive home via the coastal road and in the evening we have a little dinner at Themo's. A. turns in early because he missed the previous night.

Tuesdays we drive to Karlovassi where to our mild astonishment Makris hands us the paperwork for the electricity. We drive on to Vathy where F. and A. have a look in the Archeological Museum, I skip. Wednesdays and Thursdays we have quiet days around the house and Fridays we visit the temple of Hera in Ireon and the Archeological Museum in Pythagorion. The excavations next to the museum are finally open to the public so we have a look around.

Saturdays Christos the electrician drops by to fill in another form for the changing of the construction electricity into household electricity. He takes it with him to Karlovassi for some unclear reason. It seems we still have to go to the municipality in Marathokampos and to the (formerly state owned) electricity company ΔEH in Vathy. In the evening we have souvlaki's at the tavern of mother Safira and son Nikos up in Skouraiika. Sundays we visit Mylos the restaurant of Giannis in Balos.

Mondays we pick up our Swiss neighbours C. and R. from the airport and traditionally have lunch at Pappas Beach behind Ireon. At the end of the afternoon Christos the electrician visits us again with the stamped forms and sticks a sticker on our fuse box inside the house. Tuesdays we drive to the municipal hall in Marathokampos where nobody knows what to do with the forms. But, after 45 minutes of waiting, their technical engineer arrives who helps us out in fluent English. He is a friend of Makris so when the papers are not 100% ok he calls Makris and sorts things out for us. (Makris in his kindness had added the possibility to officially have electricity in the wooden hut but we have no scheme of it). So some more forms are filled out and signed and stamped and after more than 2 hours we leave the building - and have lunch on the plateia of Marathokampos for the first time in all those years.

Wednesdays we drive to Vathy to the office of the ΔΕΔΔΕΗ, some sort of administrative head office of the ΔΕΗ. After some searching for the right department, we wind up in the office of Stella, the wife of mayor Kostas, who is in charge there. She gives us a new contract for household electricity (we left out the form for the wooden cabin) and after some more signatures and stamps we are told to go to the office of the ΔΕΗ itself in Vathy to put matters into effect. There we are helped rather quickly.

In the meanwhile we get a message from Thanassis that he likes to collect the money for the use of the water of our house for the last 4 years. All together the amount is not unreasonable so after a visit to the bank we pay him - with a receipt. It appears that the number on the water meter is not the registration number - that is something completely different. Thanassis agrees to have it transcribed to our name.

And then it is time for the annual Spring Petanque Tournament at our place. The night before it has rained some and more is expected, but it stays dry. I had weeded the field a day before the rains started so it looks good. We are only a small group this time but we have a lot of fun and of course in the end the Ladies Team wins again.

Close finish but still Afterwards we have dinner at Themo's to say goodbye to neighbour D.

Thursday we drive along the scenic coastal route northwest up to Drakei. In the evening it starts to rain and this continues the next Friday. We do some odd jobs around the house and drive to Karlovassi to buy a long stone drill to make an extra electric outlet outside the house under the pergola.

Saturdays we had planned to drive up the Karvounis mountain with our neighbours C. and R. but due to the amount of rain that has fallen we skip it. We keep ourselves busy with the embedding of the garden hose under our entrance road to the fig tree and F.'s future vineyard. The pebbles we tried to fill the slot with last year have all been washed away by the rain so now we apply cement. I see Giannis from Rodopi driving down the road to his beach house so I jump in the car to follow him and give him a cake I baked from the eggs he supplied us with some days earlier. At the end of the road there is a place where you can turn the car, but that has now been occupied by the jeep of the grumpy old man that has probably broken down. For Giannis is trying to tow him away with his minivan. So I have to drive backwards on the narrow road for some 200 meters good exercise for me. In the evening we have souvlaki's in the taverna of mayor Kostas up in Skouraiika. We inform him about the situation of our water meter and also tip him to visit our Swiss neighbours for a donation to the project of asphaltting the road (it seems that there is still not enough money collected to completely cover the unpaved stretch of the road). A crowd settles down in the taverna consisting of a Greek man who has worked in Germany for many years and now has returned, together with some Germans. I do not remember having seen him before. Also the young sister of Jacobo arrives with her family and the newborn baby, which of course we have to admire.

Sundays we put the robot in the swimming pool. During the rains a lot of very fine sand has been blown into the pool, it looks more like a muddy pond than a swimming pool. Only now it starts sinking to the bottom, but we'll have to repeat it many times to get it really clean, we fear. We really start thinking about foil covering the pool, it also prevents cooling down at night.

After that it is time for a relaxed Sunday lunch on the terrace of Cypriot restaurant Stella, where we say goodbye to A. after his two weeks here.

June 2015

We start the month of June by putting A. on the plane to Amsterdam after which we go shopping since all the shops are open this Whit Monday (over here). The next days we do some house jobs. A man arrives to check the meter for the changing of the electricity, and he tips us on some substance that makes the sand precipitate in the swimming pool.

In Karlovassi we buy some stuff to precipitate the sand in the pool. After that we put in the cleaning robot but the sand still whirls up in the water, so a lot of it still remains in the pool. We repeat it some two times more but it doesn't seem to help much. What does get clean is the path behind the wooden cabin; every day I clear some metres from the weeds.

We have dinner with our neighbours H. & J. and C. & R. at the Italian restaurant in Kokkari, after a day trip in which we visit the tavern of the old lady of the mountain village of Kosmadei, the plateia in Vourliotis and the last flowering wood orchid in the woods above Kokkari. The next day neighbour R. drops by and we put all the gathered cuttings in pots. Including some new cuttings of a ficus - last winter ours had died in the frost. Kostas the mayor and Thassos drops by and hand us a bag full of little fishes. I clean them and put them in the freezer. For after a farewell dinner at Mylos' in Balos the next morning we leave for the airport at 7 o'clock for an 8 day tour of Albania.

We have lots of time to change planes in Athens, so we take our time to buy a new little backpack for F. The one from the Lidl's had torn apart after some 4 times of using it. As we board some police officers escort a young man to the plane and wait until the door has closed - no residence permit we assume. Also, a Bhagwan-follower boards, clad in dark red cloth. I did not know that they still existed, let alone whatever spiritual matter one might be looking for in former communist Albania.

We land in Tirana at the end of the afternoon after a glimpse of some snow remains on the mountains (highest one 2700 m I read later) and broad flowing rivers between green hilly/mountainous landscape. We take a taxi to the hotel, where we are provided with a ground floor room when we ask. We have a beer (F.) and a stiff gin-tonic for a few leks, waiting for the group to arrive. Which arrives a few hours later, accompanied by our tour guide Dutch Jorik who works in the tourism industry over here. We have dinner in a little diner around the corner. F. tries a glass of raki. Half past 10 we turn in.

The next morning our Mercedes minibus (with airco, fortunately, since it is pretty hot outside) leaves for a tour around the country. Jorik talks Albanian with the driver, he lives here 3 1/2 years now. We leave Tirana and via some business area the countryside changes into the outer parts of the port town annex seaside resort Dürres. There we have a coffee break and provided with 3 big bags of strawberries for 3.5 euros we drive on to the south. I find the cities clean and spacious, you hardly see old shacks. And everywhere people are working: on highways, houses, buildings, condos etc. The Greek better watch out or they'll be surpassed by the Albanians!

Our next stop is the 13th century monastery of Ardenica, where the fresco's survived some 600 years of neglect and mistreatment (550 by the Ottomans and 50 by communism). The resistance fighter against the Ottoman rule, Skanderberg, is said to have gotten married here in the 15th century. Officially it is not allowed to take pictures but the Albanian guide "turns a blind eye" for us.

We move on and see the first of the 700.000 little round 1 person bunkers which were built under dictator Hoxha. After lunch we drive in the direction of the industrial town Fier, where I notice some more ramshackle buildings. But still far less than I had anticipated. We arrive at the excavations of Appolonia, where the Greeks had a settlement from 700 B.C. on. As shown by the temple of Appollo and the (relatively small) Odeion/theatre. It seems that there still a lot of the remains of the city underneath the soil, but money and know-how lack to dig it up. There also is a little 13-15th century Byzantine church, with old fresco's and elegant capitals at the top of the pillars. The little museum on the site displays artefacts going back to the 12th

century BC. The shady area around the site is used by people to have a nice family picnic. In the distance we see entrances of enormous bunkers in the mountains, used for storage of military equipment.

We get to Vlora, the home town of our Samiotic Albanian friend Aris. Our spacious hotel room has sea view. We have a rest and then walk into town for dinner. We wind up in an Italian restaurant where we eat an enormous red grunt with the entire group. Over a nightcap on a terrace at the seaside Jorik tells that many people speak fluently Italian. Because, in the old days, you could put an iron wire or even a fork in the back of your tv and receive Italian television as a change from the state propaganda tv. Back in our room we install VPN and watch the women soccer championship in Canada on our iPad. Unfortunately the Orange Lionesses cannot withstand China and loose.

Friday we leave at 9, again southward. After half an hour we stop at a point where the Adriatic Sea (grey-blue, sandy, shallow) changes into the Ionic Sea (azure, clear, deep). After that the coastline gets mountainous and we enjoy the view as our bus climbs high on the winding roads. We have a stop in the Llogara National Park at a place where you can taste mountains tea and homemade yoghurt with honey. But not for me, I walk along the road looking for special plants. At that, I do not look at the road and suddenly I misstep and strain my ankle and graze my knee. I limp back and am taken care of accompanied by the worried looks of the entire group. And am angry with myself. I get another place in the bus where I can rest my leg. We drive on and have a coffee break at the beach of Dhermi where some people go for a swim. The electricity has broken down however so we settle for a soda instead of cappuccino. Lunch break is at a place at a big waterfall. A little before we saw the submarine base of dictator Hoxha. There still is an enormous door in a mountain side at the water, a submarine would easily fit in. It looks like the setting of a James Bond film.

The last stop for the day is at another nice viewpoint, where we have an ice cream. People speak Greek over here, we are close to the border. We arrive at our destination for the day, the seaside resort Saranda, so I can let my ankle rest in the hotel room. At 7 we leave for dinner, another fishy, preceded by freshly steamed mussels. Then Jorik has arranged that we can watch soccer, EC qualification of Latvia versus the Netherlands. We win with 2 - 0. The restaurant meanwhile has filled with Albanians celebrating weekend.

Saturdays is our last day heading south. After a swim-and-coffee-break we arrive at the excavations of Byrint, at a small distance of the northern part of the Greek island Corfu. The least distance is 1.5 km (1 mile), but it seems that under dictator Hoxha the beach was guarded by patrols so you could not sneak out for a swim. The Greek border is about 10 kms away, and I can imagine that people would flee by the secret small mountain roads during the night ... We walk around the Greek and Roman excavations in bout 2 hours on shady roads. When we are finished the first day-visitors from Corfu flock in. My ankle holds on.

We drive back and turn away from the sea into the inlands. Here are somewhat more ramshackle villages. We have lunch in a forest, again next to a waterfall. The area is mountainous and we see some hydroelectric power plants, some still under

construction. After lunch we take a short walk to “the Blue Eye”, a crystal clear blue well in a river. The water rises up with great force for over some 50 metres.

We leave the mountains and drive into a wide valley. After another stop for some “patisserie” (Greek spoken) we arrive at Gjirokastra, a mountain village glued against the hills. We say goodbye to driver Altin. We have a siesta in our room, the hotel is decorated in local ancient style. We hear the muezzin calling for the evening prayers, which is a bit remarkable since we are so close to orthodox catholic Greece. However people aren't very religious over here after 50 years of communism. Marriages are only registered in the town hall and hardly in churches or mosques.

We have dinner on the patio of a little restaurant in the old “bazar”. People are sitting out on the streets meanwhile watching soccer on the tv, a friendly match Albania-France. Albania leads so happy faces everywhere. After dinner we climb back to the hotel where we have a nightcap on the roof balcony.

Sundays we climb up the cobblestones to the fort of Ali Pasja (the same one as in Ioannina) that towers over the city. Now there is a Weapon Museum inside, impressive 20th century canons are lined up in the big galleries. Outside on the fortifications a “USA espionage airplane” is displayed, next to the nice clock tower. The view from the fort is very nice.

After the usual coffee break we walk to a house that is (re)decorated in the original 19th century style. It belonged to a rich muslim family who got it back from the government in the 90's. The granddaughter leads us around. About 30 people lived in the house which is a little fortress itself, with thick walls and small spy-holes. Men and women lived mostly separately. Downstairs was storage area, 1st floor winter rooms and 2nd floor summer residence with lots of patios and balconies.

The last visit of the day is the rebuilt (burned down) house where dictator Hoxha was born. It now houses an ethnographic museum. I like the wrought iron cradle. When Jorik opens a cupboard somewhere in the house a bunch of old black-and-white pictures show up on the communist period and Hoxha. Funny, they were stored there and not yet thrown away.

We have a byrek for lunch, a triangular piece of dough filled with spinach or cheese and then grilled. After that we take a long siesta in our hotel room since climbing and descending over all those wobbly cobblestones has caused my ankle some pain. In the evening we have dinner at another patio-restaurant and another nightcap on the roof balcony. A friend of Jorik joins us, he tells us about the house he bought over here and how he is renovating it to open as a backpackers hostel next year.

Next day we leave Gjirokastra in northern direction. After a coffee break next to a big statue of Ali Pasja we leave the new highway and turn into the countryside over old roads. Jorik tells that this is the old way to the north, and that the gps still gives this road if you program it. That explains to us why our neighbours D. and L. were complaining so much about the roads in Albania when they drove back to Belgium! We enter an area with small-scale oil drilling, at one of the few pumps still in working order we have a closer look. You can smell the stench from a long way off.

We arrive at the excavations of Byliss, where we are the only ones to admire the Illyrian, Greek, Roman and Byzantine remains. After lunch we have a wine tasting at

a winery. The wines are okay but not so good that we want to buy them. We do however buy a bottle of walnut raki as a curio.

Late in the afternoon we arrive at Berat, beautifully clad against the hillsides along a river. After some rest we take a stroll on the boulevard in the sunset. Lots of people parade around, quite nice. We have a pizza and grilled scampis (me) and stick to our habit of taking a nightcap on the roof balcony.

The next morning we take a walk around town. Across the boulevard, to the old mosque, where a nice man leads us around. We only have to take our shoes off, no fuss about shorts or tops or uncovered hairs. We have a look in another old mosque, next to it, of the more liberal Bektashi movement. Since not many people practice religion you can also rent the mosque for a wedding party. After that we climb up and down the small streets of the old quarter, puffing since it is steep and the air is hot again. After the rain of last night all the clouds have disappeared again. Across the bridges over the river we walk on with beautiful views on the restored white houses with numerous windows. Betar is also called "the White City" or "the City with a 1000 Windows". The story goes that dictator Hoxha did not tear it down (and replace it with communist concrete buildings probably) in fear of a huge revolt.

We load our baggage into the bus and drive to the Castle of Betar, which is more a fortified village. There we climb up (again) on slippery cobblestones, in the full sun, to a church with frescos which we are not allowed to take pictures. A little bit further on there is another church filled with Hungarian tourists who will not leave. Out of peevishness I take a picture with flash above their heads. We have a rest on a little terrace and then carefully climb back down. I buy a small tablecloth with open-knit embroidery for our new blue garden table.

After lunch we drive to Dürres where we have a short stop at the amphitheatre and two columns, an ice cream and a statue of a Dutch general who got killed in a sort of predecessor of a UN peace mission to free the Albanians from the Ottomans about a 100 years ago. At 6 o'clock we are back at our hotel in Tirana for a rest. At 8 we walk to a sort of Beer Garden for dinner. In the garden of the hotel the last bottles are emptied as a nightcap.

The last day of our group tour we sleep out and leave the hotel at 11 for a walk around town. First we have a look at the market, where we buy a bag of Albanian tobacco for Aris. After that we want to walk to the central Skanderberg Square, but it starts to pour so we flee into a coffee bar annexe gambling office. When the coffee is finished, it still rains so we walk on hiding under the big magnolia (?) trees along the pavement. At the old Ethem Bey mosque we at first are not allowed in because there is a big cleaning going on for the start of the Ramandan tomorrow. But Jorik persuades the sexton. After that we have a look in the National History Museum across the square, with a big communist mosaic on the front. Inside there is an interesting display of the communist period, but only in Albanese. Pity. When we get out the rain has almost disappeared so we walk to Hoxha's pyramid designed by his daughter (worn down and very ugly, poor kid) and his residence a few blocks further on. We have lunch on a nice sandwich and walk back to the hotel where our bus drives us to Kruja. There we have a look in another (rich muslim family) house turned into an ethnographic museum. After a visit to the bazar we drive back to the

airport where the group is dropped off. We get a lift back to the hotel and say goodbye to Jorik. We have dinner at the Chinese restaurant near the Beer Garden and indulge ourselves in Peking Duck and sweet and sour shrimps. It tastes like heaven after 2 months of Balkan food (though Jorik had said it wasn't that good). We have a nightcap at the bar and not too late we turn in, listening to the rain which has started again.

Next morning a taxi brings us to the airport without any delay. After a glance at the Dutch athletic team leaving for Crete for the EC country teams in Heraklion before us at the same gate (no Churandy Martina or Dafne Schippers to be seen) we land on Samos. And after shopping and a welcoming committee consisting of a Mother Rock Partridge and some 15 little ones on the middle of the road, we arrive home at half past 8.

The next few days we laze around. To our surprise neighbours C. and R. placed a street sign on the path at the wooden cabin while we were away: ΔΡΟΜΟ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΣ or Els' path; Els also being the Dutch name of the alder (tree). We take care of the plants of the absent neighbours. One day I notice that the road leading through the (now dry) brook has been repaired; asphaltting the last stretch of the unpaved road remains to be seen.

Victor passes by so we can arrange to have the "grass" cut. On the agreed day he starts at 8 o'clock in the morning and is finished one hour later. We show him our pictures of Albania; when he retires he wants to go back he says. Aris cleans the solar panels of the park so we can hand him the tobacco. He takes a beer with him; drinking it at our place still isn't allowed by the boss we assume.

The sand in the swimming pool has been able to precipitate for another 10 days, but when we get the cleaning robot in it still whirls up for the most part. We decide to open the outlet for a bit and swipe the sand on the bottom to the outlet. That seems to work. But still a considerable amount of sand remains so eventually we decide to empty the pool completely. We turn the outlet wide open and in a day the sand/mud mixture has disappeared. However the outlet gets clogged with all the sludge so the last part I have to mop up. And after a last cleaning the outlet is closed and the pool is filled again. But this does not take the normal 2 days since there are some problems with the water supply. Sometimes there is no pressure in the supply system and often the pressure is less than it should be. Slowly the pool fills and after 4 days is ready for use again.

We drop by Manolis' at the seaside who has also returned. When the sun sets it gets cold for it is rather windy over there. I pickle some capers, and beetroots and winter radish from neighbours C. and R. Sweet & sour, better to my taste than in "plain" vinegar.

Next Saturday neighbours R. and D. arrive for their summer stay and we celebrate it by having souvlakis, together with Manolis and them, at the taverna of mother Safira and son Nikos. We hear that Greek/American Cindy from Boston is not coming this summer due to health problems

The continuing story of the telephone/ADSL cable does not seem to continue at all. So I ask in the Germanos shop how things are developing. I get a blank stare and the

general phone number of OTE. There, after some switching, I get the phone number of the Technical Service of OTE, where nobody knows anything and I only get the general phone number of OTE I ask Manolis for help to call the Samos man from OTE for more information, since that man called me about a month ago to inquire where our house was, but unfortunately only speaks Greek. Manolis has a long conversation with the man and it comes down to the fact that a new cable should be drawn for over 200 metres. That gives some technical problems and that is why they don't do it for the time being. Our request however has been sent to Athens and maybe in a while we still might get the green light. We give up, "for the time being". In the meanwhile the negotiations between the EU and Greece have got stuck completely. Ultimatum follows ultimatum. In the supermarket we see people buying lots of canned beans, and some gas stations have run out of Euro 95 benzine. We succeed in filling the tank of our car and since we, opposed to the Greeks, have unlimited use of our "foreign" credit card and bank account, we hardly experience any difficulties.

July 2015

I get a call from the OTE the first day of July. To my astonishment they want to come to get the internet cable connected to our house. My reply that we don't even have a telephone cable does not seem to make any difference. The next day they arrive after some searching for our house. And they are gone again within 5 minutes telling me that the nearest connecting point is 400 meters away and that they don't do that. Maybe when Athens gives the green light somewhere in the future.....

F. starts to paint the now dry walls on the inside of the house which had been infested with fungi last winter. First he applies a layer of some toxicon to kill the fungi and then some layers of white plaster. It looks really nice again. Giannis from Amanda passes by and we agree that he will paint the outside walls when we are in the NL in the second half of July. He drops by to collect the cash money for the paint because the banks are still closed. Not on the agreed day of course, but one day later. I give the terrace a thorough cleaning with soap and line seed oil, so the spilt paint may come off more easily. Also, neighbours R. and D. have brought the new "high" legs for the bed, so we put them under it. I might try to sell the old ones, original Auping ones.

Giannis from Rodopi drops by with a bag full of eggs. I bake two sweet rice pies to diminish the amount of eggs. Also every day I saw off 3 branches of the dead olive tree which was infected with fungi last year. The view much nicer when the tree is finally gone.

The weather still isn't normal. There is a fierce wind for days on a row, which gives a considerable wind chill factor. In the evening it is usually too chilly to sit outside. And the pool water does not get warmer than 25°C. The only advantage is that at night it cool in the bedroom. The second week of July the wind lies down for several days and the pool water warms up to a nice temperature. So every day I dive into it. Those evenings we sit outside for a long time, in the dusk.

At F.'s birthday we have souvlakis at mayor Kostas taverna with the present folks of the παρέα. The week thereafter neighbours Y. and N. arrive with their children. We

admire their new pool bar and also have souvlakis with the four of them at mayor Kostas'. In fact, it turns out so nicely that Kostas presents Y. with a bag of fish, which Y. will clean and Kostas and his wife Stella are invited to come and eat them at his place next Sunday afternoon. That turns out to be a bit inconvenient so instead we and Kostas and Stella join Y. and his family at their place later that day, in the evening for a nice dinner, with the fish and for desert some home made ice cream with fruit salad (which I made).

One of the last days before we return to the NL for a short while, we visit our accountant again. Our tax declaration nears completion. However it shows that our representative in Greece is Thanassis' wife, which we change into our lawyer Papakonstantinou. For that a lot of paperwork has to be filled out and validated with a stamp at the KEP department of the municipality of Marathokampos. Also we have to hand over a validated copy of our latest tax declaration in the NL. When I remark that we only have digital tax declarations nowadays, I am allowed to bring a print of it. When I deliver it I am told that the first page, with our general data, has to be translated into Greek. I persuade them to e-mail it to lawyer Papakonstantinou. Back home I sent him a translation of the page in English, since the page is in Dutch. Πω πω!

The day before we return to the NL we say goodbye to Manolis, water the plants at G. & D. and R. & D. some extra time and put the garden furniture inside so Giannis will have no trouble while painting. The next morning we drive to the airport to trade warm and windy Samos for cool NL for a few weeks.

August 2015

After some maintenance service on ourselves, the house, the garden and our friends we fly back to Samos from the variable weather in the NL. Of course there are railroad works and though the trains still ride we manage to squeeze in an extra hour before we arrive at Schiphol Airport. Also thanks to a fellow train traveller who could only get rid of his aggression by pulling the emergency break several times. The airports are crowded and noisy. We land on Samos with a small delay - in Athens we had to wait for people arriving with other Aegean flights. After some shopping we arrive home where we immediately open all the blinds and windows to bring down the inside temperature. We fall asleep in a silence only disturbed by the cicadas.

The next morning we clean the house and take the garden furniture outside. Due to the temperature (hothothot) we have an elaborate siesta in the afternoon. After a heavenly dive into the pool at the end of the afternoon we leave for a welcoming dinner at Mylos in Balos with R. and D. When we drive back through Koumeika we see Aris and stay for a long chat at Maria's taverna on the plateia.

Wednesday is the traditional village festival in Koumeika. Again a long night; the prices of the lottery are only announced at 1 o'clock. The next day I wake up with a thick and sore throat; I had been sitting in the wind of the portable ventilator at home for a long time and now I get the result. I feel feverish and do not do much that day.

While we were away Giannis has painted the outside walls of our house and checked the roof. He drops by to collect his money and assures us that next winter we will not have any problems with water, humidity, fungus etc. Mayor Kostas drops by with a

bag of cooking pears. The doorman replaces the cracked panel of the front door with a new one. The garage calls us to tell that the rubber for the front window of our car has arrived. When we drive down it appears that a rubber for between the front window and the hood has been delivered. Which probably should have been replaced some time too. The rubber for the front window now is ordered from Athens. The temperature has dropped that first week from max. 39°C (in the shade!) to 35°C. One evening we hear and see a thunderstorm in the distance. The pool water is nice and warm, 30°C, and the cleaning robot makes overtime to get rid of the sand on the bottom. The weather remains strange from time to time; some overcast days with in the evening some raindrops.

Saturday afternoon we drive to Pythagorion with R. & D. and their sail friends W. and E. There I kind of quickly are able to book tickets for the ferries for our 3 Islands Tour in the beginning of September. Then we indulge ourselves in plates and plates of delicious sushi at Unan the sushi bar. And at the end of the evening we enjoy the concert of the Greek reggae band Locomondo at the yearly Ireon Rock Festival. Sandy of Yes-Rent-A-Car also is present, he tells us that he has been part of the organising committee for 10 years now (from the beginning?). Tired but completely happy we roll into our beds at half past 2 in the morning.

The next day we pick up R. & D. in Pythagorion. They'd gone on a sailing trip with W. and R. We have some dinner, but not much, we are still full from the sushis. The days thereafter we keep quiet. I sew a new, thick covering for the solar panel. The previous thin one had been torn apart last winter. The cleaning robot keeps up scooping sand out of the pool on its numerous rounds.

Wednesday we get the sad phone call that Amsterdam H. in Balos eventually has had to give up her struggle against ALS. We're sad, but spend the large part of the day retrieving memories of all the good times we had together.

Thursday we have lunch at Kyriakos' in Balos with R. & D. and E. & R. and some more guests. We make plans for jeep safaris up the Kerkis and the Karvounis because we are informed that the roads are okay again. Friday the pope's wife drops by with bags full of groceries from their garden. I donate the eggplants to R. & D. because they are not really my thing. Saturday evening we drive up to Skouraiika to have the traditional souvlakis in the taverna of mother Safira and son Nikos. We are almost the only customers.

The second half of August starts with the continuing warm weather and we attend a concert with songs of Theodorakis in the 2500 year old theatre of Pythagorion. Preceded by another sushi meal at Unan's. We also drop by Maria's in Karlovassi to have our hair cut. With R. & D. and the newly arrived G. & D. we attend the memorial gathering for H. in Hotel Princess Tia in Balos. It is short but impressive, I record in all on video to send to H.'s family in the NL and others. Afterwards we have dinner at Themo's.

We start on the last stretch of painting the inner walls of our house infected with fungi; the kitchen wall. For that, we have to move several small and big cupboards. Several of the lousy plastic legs spontaneously break as we do so. We quickly support the cupboards with books underneath. I make the virtue of a necessity and clean all the shelves and the inner walls. When the wall is painted neighbours G. and R. help

us put the big cupboard back into the corner; a big log now supports the backside instead of the legs. I put everything back into the cupboards and end up with some free space since I threw away a lot.

The Friday morning I walk up to the fig tree on neighbours D. & L.'s piece of land. It is loaded with ripe figs so I walk back with a big plastic bag filled to the brim. I give away 2/3 to the neighbours and of the bruised ones I make chutney.

Retired neighbour Manolis drops by and tells us that that evening there will be a culinary festival in Pyrgos. We drive up with neighbours R. & D. On the old plateia we indulge in the delicious food with many plates so far unknown to us. Rolled meat filled with feta and veggies, a kind of empanadas filled with eggplant and cheese, best marinated calamari ever, potato salad, chicken wings with noodles, too much to taste everything. All prepared by the local House Wife Union of Pyrgos. Also the homemade red wine tastes really good. In the meanwhile we listen to the music and some youngsters perform traditional dances in a really professional way. Then, to our very delighted surprise, the violinist shows up who performed at the wedding of Jacobo and Darina some four years ago. He starts to play, standing on a table from time to time, and immediately the mood rises and everybody starts to dance. He also sings my favourite, "Pios, Moro?". The food in the stalls is almost gone when we drive home.

Saturdays there is the Onion Feast at Balos, but the Sunday thereafter is "our" feast in Skouraiika so we do not attend. It gets a bit too much. Saturday evening there also is the celebration of Panagia in the little chapel of Pevkos, but we also let that pass. For the last 6 years we have gone every time ... But it strikes us that they start really early this year, the sun is not down yet. We can hear parts of it because the strong wind blows in our direction. Maybe because they want to be finished before the Onion Feast starts? Because of the wind we also hear music as it starts in Balos. They make it a late night, as I go to the toilet around 3 in the night I still hear them playing.

So Sunday we drive up to Skouraiika where our parea (neighbours H. & J. have also arrived) is seated at a big table close to the music - including a clarinettist, the "Turkish" element in the music of this Eastern Greek island. It makes talking difficult from time to time. The pope from Karlovassi in his "dust coat" is also present, as usual. To everybody's surprise the stout owner of the Leon restaurant in Platanos also shows up, in his best but crinkled summer jacket. He shakes hands with everybody and then sets himself near to the music. We have a laugh because his hair, which looks like a toupet, gets to stand wildly around his head more and more due to the strong wind. Then he suddenly grabs the microphone and it shows that his voice is quite good. He aubades young R., daughter of our neighbour N., at our table. We plan to leave not so late but that does not succeed as mayor Kostas offers some bottles of wine to our table. It is 1 o'clock as we roll into bed.

The next (or actually the same) morning we get up at seven, and a refreshing shower gets us going again. We drive up to the Lidl for some shopping and then at 10 o'clock we pick up neighbours C. & R. from the airport. We have lunch at Pappas Beach and in the afternoon take a siesta while watching the WC Athletics. "Our" Dafne gets silver. we

Tuesdays we drive up to Marathokampos (holiday period is over in Greece) to the accountant to hear how things are with our tax declaration. It is sent to Athens, we are told, now we must wait for the bill to come. October probably, Christina tells us. Next we move to the municipal hall where we want to try to put the water meter in our name. We end up at the KEP where the friendly young man helps us out. But the bill so far has not been paid yet. Fortunately I can show him - on my iPad - the receipt Thanassis signed at the end of May when we paid him the money we owed for the water. We agree that I send him the receipt by e-mail and then everything will be ok.

Wednesday Manolis and his friend Anna come to have dinner with us. I have prepared Indonesian food, and I only have to put the dishes into the oven. After that I have an elaborate shower. When I return to the kitchen I see that nothing has happened since the bottle of gas has run empty just now. We quickly change the bottle and afterwards enjoy the food in a relaxed way.

Thursday we have a jeep safari around the Kerkis; the entire area plus friends have decided to join in. So we drive up with 5 cars in a row and 13 people inside. There are no flowering plants left but the views remain awesome. We have a drink at the old lady's taverna in Kosmadei; C. hands her a picture he took last time we were there. For lunch it is decided that we drive up to Pnaka under Vourliotes. There fortunately we all find a space to park the cars. When we sit down at a long row of tables some Greeks arrive who park their cars in such a way that all is blocked. We are the polite ones and move our cars when someone wants to leave, the Greeks don't move from their tables. Really! (Eventually it shows that one young lady does not know how to park at all; the staff of the restaurant turns her car for her and places it ready to leave). We drive E. to the starting point of the trip, where here small car is, at the harbour of Ormos. There we have a drink on the plateia.

The next days we lazy around and watch the athletics in the afternoon. The wind lies down eventually so the water in the pool does not cool down any further..... during the strong winds it had dropped under 27°C brrrr

The last day of August we have a joint dinner with some neighbours since their friends P. & A. will leave when we will be on our 3-Islands-Tour the first week of September when they fly back home. We indulge in the specials of the day: seafood spaghetti and chicken in a creamy mushroom sauce. On the way back a big fat hare crosses the road. It will have to take care because in two weeks the hunting season starts

September 2015

The second day of September we leave Pythagorion by catamaran-ferry at half past 8, on our way to Kos. It is a relatively large ferry with even room for 6 cars. We find ourselves window seats inside - the airco is nice since it is already hot again. The average day maximum of August (35°C in the shade) was still reached the day before. We sail on a smooth sea past Samiopoula and "our" bay - first to Fourni. In Agios Kyrikos a lot of people get on board, but most of them disembark at Patmos, the island with the famous fortified monastery of St. John the Baptist. We continue along dozens of small islets and stops in the harbours of Lipsi, Leros and Kalymnos to

reach the harbour of Kos Town in the afternoon. After we cast a view on a man parasailing behind a small motor boat - did not my Dad do that on Kos too in his old age?

We make our way through the crowds (50% tourists and 50% refugees from the Near East) to our hotel. We have lunch at the harbour and then have a si sta since in town there is no cool breeze like at the harbour side. Wifi in the hotel is rather weak so we close our eyes for an hour or two. At night we have a nice meal of Peking Duck at the local Chinese restaurant amidst many Dutch tourists. After that we have a nightcap on the terrace of our hotel while we chat with the owner. And again we find that people treat you differently once they learn that you speak Greek and that you live in Greece. Back at our room the wifi has improved so we watch an episode of the Dutch programme "Between art and kitsch" where a so far unknown wood carving of Karel Appel is found - not to my taste but very valuable!

The next morning we take the local bus to the Asklepion (sanatorium) of Hippocrate just outside town. From under the pine trees we admire the excavations for an hour or so. Sometimes you can smell the sulfur from the wells. We take the bus back and then get out at the first stop at the harbour. There we find that the (Syrian) refugees are sheltered in tents standing side by side on the pavement, at least a hundred of them. Inside, in the heat, people sitting meekly waiting for transportation further into Europe. Like a grandfather with a 8 year old grandson. The tourists swarming around them. On the other side of the street the big luxury yachts of the Westerners lie moored We have a frapp  to calm down from this shocking confrontation. Anyway, we continue our tour to the Archeological Museum. That is closed due to renovation, as in no information guide or leaflet is mentioned. The renovated Roman villa makes up for it and afterwards we walk on alongside remains of ancient Greek and Roman buildings. And an old minaret which is very photogenic. After a lunch and much fluid we move on along the ancient remains. They are freely accessible, the remains of the mosaics and frescos meagrely protected by small gates. So someone has had the idea to carve some modern graffiti into a fresco After the nice Roman theater with an almost complete mosaic floor next to it we finish the cultural part of the day. We have an ice cream and a rest in the hotel; for dinner we go to the Mexican restaurant. There we see an enormous ferry from SuperFast mooring in the old harbour. Since we know that SuperFast normally only sails between Italy and Greece and that the ferry harbour is further away, we assume that this ship will take the refugees to Athens. We muse that they could also use the old Nissos Mykonos from Nell Lines, which is lying in the Karlovassi harbour, chained, since salaries haven't been paid again ... After dinner we watch the soccer games in a caf : two big screens with NL-Iceland, and two smaller ones with Belgium-Bosnia and Italy-Malta. The Dutchies make a mess of it and loose by an amateurishly given away penalty. The two other games are much more fun to watch: Belgium beats Bosnia in a clever way and Italy only barely wins (alas) from an nice and unhindered playing Malta.

The next morning we walk to the ferry harbour where we take the ferry to Rhodes, transferpoint for Santorini. Is is a huge ship, the Blue Star 2, twice the size of the ferries that sail from Samos. In two and a half hours we arrive at Rhodes. There we disembark on a deserted quai and after trudging 10 minutes in the burning sun we

reach the edge of Rhodes Town. There we have a frappé in the shade. The ferry does not sail away and when we look around on the internet we find that this ferry will leave at 4 o'clock for Santorini. Via Kos. Well ever! Bit stupid of me We decide to have a nice lunch in a nearby fish restaurant and that shows to be a bull's eye. We devour the seafood platter with freshly grilled small fishes (3 different kinds), calamari, mussels and seafood pilau. And a remarkable dry white wine which combines very well with the food. We wouldn't have missed that! We plod back to "our" ferry again where we let the food sink while resting in an easy chair.

We indeed sail back to Kos again and then on to Santorini. The ferry will continue to Pireaus after that, so in Kos a lot of people going to Athens get in. F. gets to talk with a young man from Bangladesh. He has lived in Greece for 5 years but now moves to Italy to some relatives. "Because" he says, "the Greeks have to support 25 family members from 300 euro a month and besides that the political system is no good". Greece in a nutshell. But if Italy is any better? In the middle of the night we disembark at Santorini. The taxis run out pretty soon so we take a taxi van together with some other people. Of course we are two of the last to get dropped off at our hotel so well past half past one we roll into our beds.

Well rested we get up next Saturday morning and have breakfast at the hotel. Then it shows that we are not so close to the city centre of Fira as the map of Booking.com has made us believe ... We walk about 20 minutes in the sun - no shade - to the bus station and just in time get the 10 o'clock bus to the excavations of Akrotiri. There the buses with tourists have not yet arrived so in relative tranquility we admire the little town that partly has been dug out of the lava and ashes. It is a pity that you cannot walk through it at "street level", that still has to be excavated. You now walk at "roof level" - but these were made of wood and have vanished. One little square has been restored so you get part of the idea how it looked these days before the massive eruption of 1650 BC. I do wish there would be Virtual Reality apps for all those excavations (You point your iPhone at the ruins of a building and on your screen you get an extra layer of the building in the same size to inform you how scientists think it would have looked in the old days.) It is a pity that they did not put replica's of the frescos in the buildings

We drive back with the bus through vineyards, fields with low shrubs amidst the grey lava sands, and modern houses and white washed churches. After a frappé we visit the museum to admire the frescos. They are of breathtaking beauty. I especially like the one with the blue monkeys and the one with the lotuses. I think I remember seeing the one with the fisherman in the museum of Crete, good that it is back where it belongs. But still missing are the ones with the saffron pickers, the boxers, the antilopes and the dolphins. The pottery is lavishly decorated, a sign that people lived in prosperity in those days ... Jewellery has not been found but it seems that people were warned that the volcano would erupt and so left taking their valuables with them There is a theory that the tsunami which followed the eruption was the cause that first the Red Sea turned dry the moment Moses wanted to cross it to lead his people out of Egypt and secondly the high waves swallowed the army that followed them Also the 7 Plagues are connected with the massive eruption(s)

We have lunch at a pancake house and chat with a retired couple from Athens and a lone organ player from Ghent Belgium. We book an excursion for Sunday afternoon until after sunset, a caldera tour by boat. After that we take another sweat walk back to the hotel. It is an unusual hot September. After the siësta we walk back into town. There we cross some streets filled with tourist shops and tavernas to wind up on a terrace overlooking the rim of the caldera. We watch the beautiful sunset while sipping a cool drink at Parisian prices. I take a lot of pictures, it remains a beautiful view. After the pancake lunch this afternoon we are not very hungry so we settle for some sushi and wontons in a sort of Chinese take away where you can also sit down. After that I have my favourite Margarita on a terrace. After some internetting and football/soccer watching a parade of drummers, stilt-walkers and acrobats parade down the street. Well, it's a change from a concert with Theodorakis songs

The next Sunday morning we sleep out and after breakfast we chat with a young Australian couple. After that we walk towards the ton centre and have coffee and refreshments. We get a few rolls and leave our luggage at the booking office for our tour. Then we walk to the pick up point for the excursion. The bus takes us down to the ferry harbour while descending on the steep hairpin curving road. With breathtaking views. We sail and after a stop at the old harbour of Fira we moor at the middle of the caldera where there is an islet built of lava rocks. For an additional 2 euros you can climb to the top of it. But it is very warm again so we decide to stay on board while having a cool beer in the shade Dripping with sweat the group returns after an hour. Then we set sail (actually we use the diesel engine) to some hot springs where there is a possibility to swim. Diner (simple but not bad) is served relatively early so after that we can sail to some more nice spots and finally get out of the caldera to watch the sunset. I notice that some 6 other large boats also follow this route. The sunset itself is a bit disappointing since there is a bit of fog on the horizon. But still nice though. As we sail back at full speed the music is turned to a maximum and dancing begins at the quarterdeck of the boat (Abba old). I look at the steep crater walls with their many layers of stone and lava, I think I even see some puffins at some point. How sad it is that this beautiful and impressive collapsed volcano with a diameter of 6 x 10 kms has been so ruined by mass tourism I'd have loved to make an excursions with a geologist to get a better impression of what has happened during this enormous eruption some 25 centuries ago

At 9 o'clock we are dropped off in the centre of Fira. There we have some drinks and do some internetting and are relieved that we missed out on the scornful defeat of the Dutch soccer team against Turkey. We walk to the bus station where we take the bus to the ferry harbour. There the first ferry to arrive is not ours, that one is delayed so it is 4 o'clock in the night when we get into our cabin.

After a wake-up call for Kos at half past 7 we arrive at the harbour of Rhodes Town at half past 11 in the morning. We arrive at our hotel in the old walled city centre, again in a sweat. We cool down in our room and then walk into town for lunch. We wind up in a nice fish restaurant where we try clams and sea urchin. We lack the energy to take pictures of the old town because of the heat. Instead we have another siësta. When the sun has nearly set, we walk into town again and now I take a lot of

pictures. On a little square we take a seat and watch the crowds. We are not hungry after our fish lunch so we just have a drink. We turn in not too late.

Our last real excursion day we get up early. After a freshly prepared breakfast we make a big tour through town passing Byzantine, Ottoman and Cross Knight fortifications and buildings. All very photogenic. We wander around some old alleys and I imagine that if you want to shoot a Medieval movie you can just use this area as a background (just remove some signboards). We enter the Archeological Museum, which is housed in a Medieval "hospital". Then it is time for a refill because we have lost a lot of fluid during our walk. For lunch we sit down at a tavern near to our hotel - away from the crowds. F. has a freshly grilled sea bream; I opt for a more conventional schnitzel. After our traditional siesta we walk into town again and have some nice drinks. I get the impression that there are fewer tourists than yesterday, we see the locals sitting down on benches "watching monkeys".

The next morning we walk to the ferry harbour. There the place is deserted. There is however a counter in a cabin which is staffed, and there we are told that our ferry leaves from the other side of the old town. We will be able to get there on foot, but when I see a taxi we grab it so there is no stress when we board the catamaran-ferry to Kos in good time. The strong wind which was forecasted has not come so we sail to Kos on a mild rolling sea. After a short stop on the small charming island of Symi, where a lot of daytrippers disembark. Just before we arrive at Kos a group of men is directed towards the exit, hand cuffed. ??

When our connecting catamaran-ferry arrives, we quietly move forwards so we are almost the first to board, on the left side (yes, port side) at the window for the view. However, after Kalymnos the sea gets a bit rough and the man behind us throws up his entire lunch (the only one on the entire ship). Probably he had some glasses of wine too because before that he had been snoring loudly from the moment we left Kos. So we move to another spot because of the smell. There are many people on board so we have to sit in the middle. After Patmos we can luckily get back to our seats (the stewards cleaned the mess). We watch a nice game of basketball between Greece and Slovenia on tv. Half an hour late we arrive on Samos. There we drive to Balos where there is a farewell dinner for all the brothers and sisters of D. (& R.). Neighbours D. & L. have also arrived with some relatives, and including neighbours C. & R., G. & D. and H. & J. we are 22 in total. Later we find out that young S. & P. are also present at Themo's.

The next days we spend with clearing, washing and cleaning the house, so we can leave that when next Saturday our friend S. arrives. We do however find out that during our absence the adjoining piece of land of our neighbours D. & L. has been stripped clean of bushes and weeds. The men also did our neighbouring stretch and that is nice of course. But unfortunately they drove there mini shovel right over my night cam which I had put up to try to get pictures of jackals drinking from a bowl of water I had put there. Broke! I have to order a new one straight away because the model will be taken out of production - to be replaced by more expensive models.

Saturdays we have the autumn petanque tournament - the ladies team wins again, it starts to get a bit embarrassing Afterwards we have souvlakis at mayor Kostas' tavern in Skouraiika. Since it is half September, so for some of our neighbours it is

time to return to Western Europe again. Sunday we say goodbye to neighbours C. & R. and D. & L.; Monday night we have an elaborate and delicious meal at Stella's in Balos to say goodbye to R. & D.

The second half of September starts and it is still warm. Day maximums between 31 and 34°C. In the afternoon and evening there is a bit of wind, but the pool water fortunately does not cool down any further than 27°C. Bit chilly at first, but good for a swim. Wednesday we drive the car all the way up to the top of the Karvounis (1135 m). Even the north side of it is so dry that there are still no autumn flowering plants. We take our time to explore all the roads in the area and have a picnic for lunch.

Aris drops by - he finally left Thanassis after two years without payment - and he has a beer on the terrace like in the old days. We agree that in October he can come and paint the wooden cabin.

Thursday we drive the rough coastal road from Perri to Tsopela. Underway we have a look in the little village of Vergi. We have a drink in the beautifully situated Tsopela at the tavern of some old crazy Greek and his German wife. After that we drive to Pythagorion for some shopping and a delicious sushi meal for the third time this year. Saturday we traditionally have souvlakis at the other taverna in Skouraiika, of mother Safira and her son Nikos. Retired Manolis accompanies us, and by mistake S. is first taken for his girlfriend. We quickly correct it, to suppress possible gossip.

Monday we make a tour around the Kerkis because rain has been forecast for the next few days. Up on the mountain side it is foggy, we drive between the clouds. In the evening it still is warm so we watch the spectacular, almost continuing lightning in the distance somewhere between Ikaria and Chios. The wind blows away from us so we hear nothing. Tuesday morning finally it starts to rain. Good time to bake some sweet rice pies for the celebration of Ag. Giannis, St. John, next Saturday. Manolis calls and invites us over for lunch, he made ratatouille. While we eat we watch a falcon which tries to catch a swallow.

The next day we make a trip to Koumaradei, where we first visit the monastery of Megali Panagia (The Great All Saints) and then E. & R. who almost return to Belgium. We buy two of R.'s paintings, one for the house on Samos and one for the house in Maastricht. Friday it is hot and sunny again, I take another dip in the pool. In the evening we have dinner at Themo's, with the pareia, to say goodbye to S. L. and her mother are also present, the latter being a hale and hearty lady of 85, from a family with 15 children (!).

Saturday I rise early to drive S. to the airport. I immediately drive back to be in time to take the sweet rice pies to the little church below us. The new young pope leads the celebration and he takes his time. Finally we sit down at the tables for breakfast. My rice pies are truly appreciated. As we leave I ask meyor Kostas if there are some bills for us and he hands us the electricity bill. It is a large amount of money and as we study it we find out that it includes the previous bill as well which hasn't been paid. Back home we see that from the previous bill the automatic payment has been stopped. Hell! Probably because we switched from building electricity to household electricity. Monday we hurry to Karlovassi for the payment. We're actually 10 days late so let's hope the electricity isn't cut off again! And we visit our bank again to apply for automatic payment; this being the third time.

Neighbour H. thrusts a big bag of eggplants on us and as I am fed up with stuffed egg plants and ratatouille I decide to make them into eggplant puree. Which is quite a job: first roast them, then take out the soft "meat", then pass it through a sieve, then let it drip out in a cloth, and then add spices and herbs.

The announced lunar eclipse turns out to be a bit of an appointment. Specifically around the time there are thick clouds in the sky after many nights with bright moonshine. In the early hours of the morning there even are some raindrops so we hurriedly take the cushions from the garden chairs inside.

We say goodbye to neighbours G. & D., with a dinner at Themos' in Balos. I have lamb chops, again. Might be the last time this season.

The last days of September the weather gets a bit unstable. The temperature decreases and the wind gets stronger. That implies that the measures to keep the house comfortable are wound back in the reverse order: Windows not fully opened at night but ajar - fans out during the night - sleep under sheet at night - fans out during the day - blinds open half to fully during the day. Sitting outside in the evening requires a sweater and long pants. During the day it still is warm enough for tops and shorts.

October 2014

We start the month with a visit to Pythagorion where a (Samos/Greece) stamp collecting mate of F. is on holiday. They exchange stamps and philatelic news on Samos; we also visit a Greek member of that club who is married to a Dutch lady. He is fluent in Dutch which is quite an achievement!

I cut the olive trees in the lower orchard so that there is a path again. I give fresh soil to the tub plants to survive the winter; some cuttings which have formed roots are put into the red earth around the house. The ficus which froze to death last winter surprises me by producing tree new shoots - before we leave I will put a cover over it.

Aris drops by that Saturday and we agree that he will paint the wooden cabin. I tell him he can pick the olives for oil and keep half of it. Nowadays he works for Giannis from Amanda, they are renovating the house of Ricardo and Suzanne at the moment.

The "doorman" also drops by and puts a new lock in the front door. After that we have dinner at Mylos Balos with neighbours H. & J. and K. & J. and retired Manolis.

The night temperature drops so the covers are put onto the sheets for the cold early morning hours. During the day there is a bit of wind which implies that the pool water does not heat up any more - swimming season is over.

Tuesdays we have dinner at Themos' for the last time to say goodbye to neighbours H. & J. Not after I helped out H. on the red tape which comes along with applying for his and neighbour G.'s own electricity connections, at Kostas the mayor's. The latter is willing to help but due to absent ownership papers, passports, proxies, quickly scanning and e-mailing of all of them, slow internet connections, failing computers and printers, it takes the larger part of the day. We also hurry to Karlovassi with Aris to buy paint for the wooden cabin. In the meanwhile we notice that just now the country road to Balos has been properly restored again - now that all the tourists are gone.

Wednesday we go shopping at Lidl's - for the last time - and Thursdays it rains a little. Which is a good time to finish my field checklist on Samian orchids. Fridays I

cut some bushes along the Els' Path, around the wooden cabin and finally the carob tree at the solar panel so that we get back the nice view of the bay around Ormos. Saturdays we have dinner at neighbours K. & J. together with retired Manolis. It rains a little from time to time. Mondays we drop off K. & J. at the airport. The sun is back in full power so we have one of our last cappuccinos at the old harbour of Pythagorion at Manolis and Effi's. For lunch we have the traditional pitta with gyros at Robinson's. On the way back we look for autumn flowers at different spots but the rain hasn't been enough at most places. Tuesdays the only thing that disturbs the peace and quiet are two draglines which start equalising the terrain under the three houses. Did Dimitri the plumber who just got married use the donations for his wedding to finally start his aloe vera plantation? The next day Dimitris drops by himself and more or less confirms this story to us. Wednesdays Aris arrives early and energetically starts painting the wooden cabin. Thursdays and Fridays he continues.

That Saturday and Sunday - the beginning of the third week of October - the weather still is so nice that I start to clean the strip of land between that of D. & L. and us in shorts and a sleeveless shirt; the draglines already did the major part of the work. Eventually F. wants to start a vineyard there. Saturday evening we pick up retired Manolis and drive to "Uncle Dimitris'" restaurant in Pyrgos for dinner. The man has trained dogs who dig up black truffles here in the woods on Samos. But due to the drought nothing has come up yet.

Mondays and Tuesdays the warm weather continues so I clean out the entrance road. The olive trees lining it have not been cut for three years. In the little olive orchard downhill I saw down three very large and thick wild sprouts.

That Tuesday night the first good rain starts, so Wednesdays we use to drive to Marathokampos and Karlovassi, to visit the accountant, the lawyer, the bank and the internet provider, doing some shopping on the way. When the sun shines through the clouds it still is warm. Liza, Themo's sister who works at the border patrol, drops by at the end of the day to seal H.'s car with Belgian license plate for the winter; it is parked at our premises again. According to Greek traditions she arrives two hours later than the time we agreed on - but still, she probably has a lot of work with the many refugees coming in from Turkey.

The next days we have some more heavy showers and thunderstorms, so we amuse ourselves by reading, playing games and watching old movies on the laptop. The roof of our house (and that of neighbours H. & J) keeps up perfectly, we report to Giannis as he drops by to check it. In between we meet an English couple who also want to build a house on Samos. I point out that D. & L.'s piece of land is for sale.

After 4 days the rain and thunder is over and we enjoy the lovely sunny autumn weather. Dressed in pants and T-shirt I start expanding the Els Path through the little olive yard downhill. Sunday lunch we have outside on the pavement at the restaurant at the corner in Ormos.

Our last week on Samos starts a bit chaotic. First there is no water for the major part of the day (Maintenance, Kostas the mayor says as I call him eventually). The arm of my glasses breaks off (€€€€€€) and the water in the toilet keeps running when it

finally returns (floater gone loose again). The accountant has indeed received our tax assessment notice and Vasso the pedicure calls to move our appointment to one day earlier. Also our lawyer has made a concept of the official reminder for Thanassis to pay the IKA (social services premiums). Anyway, I make good headway with the Els' Path, only 10 more metres to go when I finish for the day.

So Tuesdays we start with a visit to the accountant. There we get our bill and as it is only a little amount compared to what we pay in the Netherlands, we decide to pay it all in one time. After a visit at Maria's, the hairdresser, we go to the bank to pay it. But there all the other Samians are, having to pay their first term of the Enfia, as it is called in Greek, before the 30th of the month. So after more than an hour we are outside again. We run some errands and get home where we have just finished our lunch when Vasso the pedicure arrives.

Wednesdays, during the clearing of the last stretch of the Els' Path, I find some tiny rosettes of the orchids for next season, one sprouting almost from the dried stem of an *Anacamptis sancta*, the holy orchid. Thursdays, when I am done with the path, the vegetable garden is weeded and with joy I discover a significant increase in the amount of tiny autumn hyacinths which are flowering around the house - finally. I also plant some sprouts of the oleander I dug out in the gorge of the - now dry - little river nearby. F. sprays the stems of the citrus trees with copper solution and then gives them a double layer of chalk - against insect, lice, fungi etc.

All the garden furniture is put inside and our last day, Friday, F. picks a bucket full of big Kalamata olives from the tree next to our bedroom to take home to the NL. I then in turn thoroughly trim that tree - still in shirt sleeves - since that has not been done for three years. When I'm done the terrace at the bedroom has doubled in size. After that we drive to the airport to pick up neighbours R. & D. But not after we took a glimpse at the first flamingo of the season which has come to rest in the salt lake of Psili Ammos. In the evening we dine at Stella's Restaurant with retired Manolis and R. & D. Actually they're closed for the winter already but Kyriakos makes an exception for us and treats us with very tasty dishes.

On the last day of our stay, also the last day of October, we get up at a quarter to 5; neighbour R. drives us to the airport. There we chat for a while with the wife of the doorman, who is going to her relatives in South Africa with the entire family. The flights to Athens and Amsterdam go smoothly and right on time. Which cannot be said of the baggage handling, the trains and the local bus to our house. We are home only at a quarter past seven and since the supermarket around the corner is closed for renovation I get a meal at the Chinese take away. I am back just in time for a double episode of the new season of *Downton Abbey*.