

The Ekeren Files

Volume 19 – December, 2006

'The getting ready for the new year'

Wouter: should be biking to work with his flashy bike but likes his bed too much and can't get up in time...but is still in 'good-enough' shape.

Anita: 6th Year revalidation training at the Nottebohm clinic, preparing for the holidays.

'The Snow':

10-17.12.2005, ISCHGL: Our yearly week of snow in December. For the last few years, we've been in the highest group of the ski-school. This year, the accent was on the short turns : tick-tack-tick-tack-tick-tack...at the end of the week it worked out nicely and we had a huge profit from it in our next trip to :

04-11.03.2006, OBERNBERG : a whole week of climbing up mountains, looking for virgin slopes to come down again. I took my camcorder with

me so we could comment on each other in the evening. Hilarious !

'Chamonix: Climbers' Paradise!'



23.06-02-07: For the second time, our group raided the high peaks of the Alps : rock-climbing with emergency rappels because of a thunderstorm, glacier-crossings, ice-climbing in steep gulleys. We watched an injured climber being extracted from the mountain flank with a helicopter in very bad weather. And as the highlight of the trip : climbing the 'Mont-Blanc du Tacul' (4248m) from the 'refuge des cosmiques'. Breathtaking views, walking on crampons between ice-boulders as big as a house and jumping crevasses; at those days, you really feel that you're alive & kicking ! You can see some pictures at : <http://verticaal2007.vbwaasland.be/pers.html>

'The Diving'

Anita only dives during holidays. I'm still training for the deep wreck dives and switched from open circuit diving to a very nice Inspiration rebreather.

01-09.01.2006, EGYPT

We started the new year the right way : holidays! Maybe you remember ordeal I went through last year after going to Egypt without Anita? I made a wise decision and took her along this year. Diving was terrific again this year and Anita even found a nice dive-light for me on a wreck.

23-30.09.2006 ST. TROPEZ

With a group of our tech-dive team, we went to Saint-Tropez again to practice on the deep wreck dives. After my 4th dive, my arm began to hurt. To keep on the safe side, I went into the hyperbaric chamber for treatment. It was no big deal and I was cleared shortly after. But no more diving in this holiday.



20-27.11.2006 EGYPT

Another cruise on the Red Sea with the MY Sea Serpent. The dives are getting more technical/adventurous which Anita learned the hard way. On the Aïda, a wreck at the Brother Islands, she hung like a flag in the current and I had to pluck her away from it. She skipped the next dive, which was on the Numidia : a 105 year old wreck, covered with corals and full of beautiful tropical fish. Even more current than on the Aïda, but worth it : after more than a century, the ship is still completely intact, I made my deco-stop in the engine room on top of the steam-machine; fantastic!

'The Working'

Part I: the working in the Ardennes

At last : the pile of rubble and stones in front of the house is gone and now we have a new driveway as the final touch on our home in the Ardennes. I mean : on the outside.

Inside still needs a lot of work but we took a big (and expensive!) step this year :

The second staircase is in place, the railing around the mezzanine is almost ready. We put in a very fancy shower in natural stones from a local quarry; even the owner of the quarry came to look at it because the result is so nice.

The new dam Anita built last year holds the water well after we put in a plastic liner.

At last, the most important item has arrived :



Part II: the working at work

After 6 months, Anita got a permanent contract at VCD + a nice pay-rise and from June, we are driving a new company car; a Volkswagen Caddy people. Very convenient to transport my diving gear. The company paying for the car wash is even more convenient

In May, Anita went to Cannes for a business conference. She had no problem at all to blend in with the rich & famous people, although she was

happy when the paparazzi were kept on a distance during the reception on the pier of the Carlton Hotel. The sailing cruise before was also very enjoyable. She didn't have to drive, so she had a go on the champagne.

After a small operation on her shoulder (yes, she's been dragging rocks last year to build a dam...) Anita wasn't allowed to drive the new car for a month, so we installed the 'Home Office' where she can log into the companies' network. Now she's working 2 days per week at home. This temporary situation is now lasting for 8 months already...and it's great : it saves 2 hours driving each day she stays at home.

At my job, it's been a very busy year : 3 months paramedic-training on top of my normal job + taking leadership courses for my future responsibilities. I have been setting up a rental service for safety equipment, but since the software is to be developed, it's been quite hectic with a lot of paperwork. Luckily, there have been some nice fires and I've had an extra week training in the local hospital's emergency unit where I was part of the 'medical urgency group', a specialized rapid response unit to assist the ambulance.

Big fun !

Part III: the working in the other houses

Like last year : we're still working hard in the Ardennes, which consumes a lot of time, money and energy, so also in 2006 apart from putting a new roof on our apartment building, not much happened there.

'In Memoriam'

Erwin, a dive buddy, dies suddenly because of an aorta rupture and leaves a wife and 3 kids.

Memorial Naomi: get together with family and friends. 5 Years ago Naomi had a fatal accident on this day.

Tina's mum does not get new kidneys in time and leaves us.

Tante Maria loses her battle against cancer.

So does Tante Fien.

'The Friends & the Family'

Spots on Anita's dad face turn out to be shingles. It affected his eye and since then he's been wearing sunglasses, even in pouring rain...

Anita went to the Abba musical MAMMA MIA! with her mum. Hmm, nostalgia; oh yes, tens & twenties are long gone (but it doesn't feel that way)

Pascale and Dimitri have a little sister for Sara; cuuute!!

Debbi & Larry are in Ekeren for 3 days; as chocolate stocks in the city are getting lower, Debbi is getting happier !

Anita's mum & dad don't want to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary; too much hassle, too much stress, too much people, etc.

But we wanted to have a party ! So we organised one in the Ardennes and invited them as well. Wonderful !



Tina & Paul, who stayed for 2 weeks in the Ardennes and are finally taking an orientation course to find their way in Belgium. (and yes Paul, the shortest way between two points is a straight line)

This year, Antwerp was guest harbour for the Tall Ships' Race.



Also the 'regulars' like Kate, Andy, Jo & Maddy stayed for a week, as did my brother Luc with Chris, Hanne & my godchild Eva.

Kristel, a friend I met 20 years ago on a climbing course, has been training for a triathlon and after competing in Australia & Switzerland, she was selected for the legendary 'Iron Man' on Hawaii. I guess I'll have to blow the dust from my bike and start doing something...

'The Cat'

The nice little kitten we found last year in the Ardennes has grown. The neighbours call him 'the gangster': when Gaston is out, all the other cats stay in...

During our skiing holiday in December, Gaston stayed at my brothers place and of course managed to slip out of the front door and run to freedom. Flyers in the neighbourhood, pictures on the internet, pamphlets in the store and finally at new years' eve after 12 days, we got a phone call with good news : Gaston has been eating the food of their cats for a week now and if we can please come to pick him up. He's happily home now.

'The Team'

The team is getting better and better. We are so good that we even managed to pick 2 kg of nice apples from our pear tree...isn't that something! Not to mention the bucket of prunes we picked from the Autumn flowering *cherry*.

This year I turned 40. For compensation I bought another car and with tears in my eyes, I said goodbye to my 14-year old Audi.

After 15 years, Anita bought new glasses and had a matching haircut :



Hugs & kisses from,

Anita, Wouter & Gaston, the cat

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That's it for now !

Ps : Because you always ask : Both Anita's and my mum & dad are fine and happy !