

# The Ekeren Files

Volume 24 – December 2011 (printed February 2012)

## 'The getting in shape'

Before I start writing our X-mas letter, I always have a look at the last ones to refresh my memory. I got very tired just reading about all the things we did during the last three years : building houses, 2 diving expeditions, a movie project in South Africa & Mozambique, a journey of 2 months to Papua New Guinea, Australia & New Zealand etc...+ fulltime jobs. During 2010, Anita's body and mind decided together that enough is enough and they went on strike: burnout, of course ignored..., and as a result a depression at the end of the year 2010.

Coping with this has been our major project in 2011:

The 3<sup>rd</sup> of January we went together to Anita's first visit to the psychiatrist. The first thing I noticed there were the oversized boxes of paper tissues on his desk. In about 10 minutes, he succeeded to diagnose what a few others couldn't do in 6 months.

He also gave the solution: slow down the working, take pills (happy pills we call them: fantastic stuff, they really work!!) and do a mindfulness-training: be

mild to yourself and learn to live in the 'now'.

Result after 1 year: Anita is my happy girl again!!!

## 'The Snow'

At the moment that I'm writing this letter to you, I'm surrounded by snow-capped mountains and I'm still wearing my skiing pants after our first day of skiing. The snow in Ischgl is very nice again this year. There isn't very much, but since we only use the upper 5cm, we don't care a bit about it!

Update: It has been snowing for 48 hours now and we spend the day bashing through heaps of fresh snow. Big fun!!



## 'The working'

### Part 1: the working in the Ardennes

Two years ago, I tore out the old bathroom and started the construction of a whole new one. Last year I covered a wall with big slate tiles. We contacted a company to place the glass mosaic in the shower, but they never showed up; so at last we bought the mosaic from the internet and contacted the local tiler to place them. He did a fine job on placing the mosaic but wasn't quick enough to clean the epoxy grout from the shower tub. I can assure you now: epoxy is bulletproof! It took me only three days to scrape it off!

### Part 2: the working at work

Anita: very little; her company was very supportive with her well-being and she was free to work as much/little as she wanted. Very nice!

Wouter: I was asked if I was interested to become a team leader, but I declined the offer. I love my job as it is right now and don't want to sit at a desk to push paper. The other colleagues who were still in the running fought a fierce battle over it...

### Part 3: the working in the other houses

One of the tenants didn't pay his rent, so we kicked him out. It took the judge about one minute to come to this decision. We then started to clean out the pig stable they left behind. If you're on a diet and want to lose your appetite, just tell me and I'll send some pictures.

It was a good opportunity to upgrade the flat: new paint, electricity, kitchen...well it took me and my dad 4 months to accomplish all this.

In April, our good friend An, mother of my godchild Roos, started to rebuild the house they were living in

and she looked for a place to live during the works. Okay, you can come and stay at our hobby house next door.



It took me and my dad a whole month to get it ready for them: insulation, electricity, plasterboards against the wall and roof + plastering (thank you Wim) + painting. Luckily I bought an airless spray gun in January: painting of a living room, 2 bedrooms and a landing took me 2 hrs.

And of course I (and my dad and thank you Wim) helped a hand with An's house: electricity, kitchen and painting.

After that: time for a break...but not for long....

We bought a new toy and now our garage is too low to put it in.

Read more about this in the next chapter:

### **'The D(r)iving and other nice things in life'**

In spring the grass starts growing and needs mowing. My old tractor needed replacement so we got a brand new one. Of course with all new things, you want to keep them tip top for as long as possible, which means cleaning after every use.



For this, I needed a 'high jack' to lift one side up so I could clean underneath the mowing deck. I looked on the internet to buy one and after not so long I found one; but it had something attached to it and they came in a package deal. So now we are the proud owners of a high jack + a Toyota Landcruiser HZJ75 overland expedition vehicle.



A machine like this asks to be driven to exotic destinations where a normal car can't go. All kind of

places spontaneously came to our mind : the alps, Turkey, Morocco, the desert.....BUT...our new toy had to stay home a little longer because we already planned our next adventure to Ile de la Reunion in the Indian Ocean next to Madagascar. On this volcanic island, we spent the most fantastic holiday. If you like steep cliffs, narrow winding canyons, hundreds of waterfalls, mums' indoor plants but then 3 meters tall, a live volcano which we actually climbed and of course good food. Not to be forgotten: Reunion grows cane and wherever there is cane, they make rum. It's not the best rum in the world, but they do wonderful things with it. Before dinner you get a nice punch, pronounced as 'ponch', rum with fresh fruit juice, and after you finished your dessert, try one of the 'rhom arrangeé', rum enhanced with extracts of vanilla or raspberry or almost anything nice you can think of. Vanilla is also one of the beautiful orchids and plants which grow abundantly in the wild. We were at the end of the season of the 'guyavier' berry. Picking those along our hiking tracks slowed us down considerably but you can't just let them hang there to rot away, can you?



For two weeks we drove around this fantastic island and enjoyed every moment of it. As cherry on the cake we stayed another week on Rodrigues, a neighbouring island. Where Reunion is a French department, Rodrigues is the perfect introduction to Africa. Not as many white people, a hotter climate, great old rattling buses, neighbour 'papi' who prepares fresh coconut for us with his machete, the colourful local market on Saturday with tropical fruit and spices but above all the friendliness and warmth of the people. Our stay at 'Kafe Marron' was, well I can't fit it in one word but it was something like being spoilt in luxury and good food and great people and and and...

Well the diving was average ;-)



### **'In Memoriam'**

A year of too many sad goodbyes.

09-01: Glynn Evans

03-12: Margaret Kenny

21-12: Anita's colleague Johan Veeninga

### **'The Friends & the Family'**

My mum and dad are still doing very well; Anita's parents had a difficult year : mum needed surgery on her back for 4 hernias. She spent most of the year lying in bed. Right now she's much better and walks around with a rollator. So they missed out on their yearly months at the seaside. Dads boat was getting more of a burden than a pleasure and he doesn't get any younger, so he decided to sell it after being a happy fisherman for over 30 years. Enough is enough and now he's happy to be rid of it.

Staying in touch with fiends we do best by spending times in the Ardennes & eat together:

An, Roos, & Wim.

Many weekends with Mia, Jill, Kai and Issy.

And a quick visit of Hilde Derveaux.

Visit of An De Roost + the 3 boys: Elliot, Tom & Marty.



The neighbours: Karin, Dirk, Pauline & Jérôme.

Our traditional August weekend with Guy, Ankie, Els, An & Roos.

Halloween with Hanne & Eva and their friends with supervision of Chris & Luc Verhelst

Our yearly visit to Bianca, Marc, Theo and Olé.

A year of only UK visitors this year:

July: Tina & Paul come to Antwerp

### **'The Cat'**

Fat and still hungry! But we still love him very much.



### **'The Team'**

We had a difficult year with Anita's healing process and my work overload in all the houses and of course Gaston's everlasting diet. But we kept on loving each other very much. So our relationship and marriage are still fantastic!

The team is still going strong!

That's it for now!

Hugs & kisses from,

Anita, Wouter & Gaston

Our mobile numbers are working most of the time:

Wouter's mobile: +32 474 405 595

Anita's mobile: +32 487 497 233

No excuses not to stay in contact with us!

[wouter@nstd.be](mailto:wouter@nstd.be)

[anita\\_van\\_gastel@hotmail.com](mailto:anita_van_gastel@hotmail.com)

Hoogpadlaan 20, B-2180 Ekeren, Belgium