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Jeanne and Matt,

Christmas 2014

Dear Friends,

2014 was a good year of staying in touch and making new connections with people and places.

I was in Holland in April and May mostly to be with Annelies. While there I enjoyed days with the two remaining members of my parents' generation, my father's youngest sister and my mother's youngest first cousin. Annelies took me to Rome and Rotterdam.

Rome was a first for us. Its 2000 year old buildings next to 200 year old ones next to 2 year olds were lovely to walk among in six sunny spring days. Rome is eye popping like its pictures. Its awful traffic is just as in the movies.

Rotterdam is now a modern city. My mind's eye kept its image of my first visit in 1948. Nearly as far as my young eyes could see were streets without buildings, their rubble removed, only curbs remained. In April 2014 Annelies and I walked the downtown from the just finished central railway station to the river's new bridges. Many office and residential buildings were recently completed. We saw vibrant retail areas. Neighborhoods that were spared war's destruction were renovated in their pre-war styles. However, I do not know that the attractive area through which we walked is the same flattened one I saw soon after the war.

In June, friends from Manila visited. I studied with them half a century ago in Boston and we stayed in touch. Weeks later, a distant cousin and his college-age nephew visited. Their father years ago helped identify our common ancestor. He came from a village on the North Sea coast in East Friesland and moved in 1831 to Amsterdam. 160 years later my father's youngest sister visited the village and returned home with a family tree showing one branch back to 1600. Those ancestors were then farmers and dike keepers. Their descendants who live in the village still are.

In August I spent twelve exhilarating days near Puget Sound and on the San Francisco Peninsula with friends and family. At my Anacortes High School class 55th reunion picnic I listened to a classmate, with whom I had never spoken, tell his story. He owns a commercial fishing boat and raises race horses. His crew and boat were at work off the California coast while he talked to me. Later in Seattle I caught up with another classmate and college roommate. He is continuing an illustrious academic career in bio-engineering and served as provost and then president of the University of Washington. Another friend devoted her career to teaching talented youngsters who also benefit from individual attention but often get less in school than children with special needs at the other end of the spectrum. These three and others are enjoyable people whom I first met during my high school years. It's good to be in their company.

On the Peninsula I liked getting to know better my nine year younger sister and meeting for the first time the special man now in her life. I met for the first time my 3 year old grand niece and 1 1/2 year old grand nephew. I reconnected with their parents whom I last saw together six years ago in Ann Arbor. I also enjoyed time with my niece and met for the first time the special man now in her life. In between I had good visits with friends, some old, some new.

Annelies came to Alexandria in the autumn for five weeks mostly to work with me. We shrank by 75% the floor area used for storing my business records in a rented storage space. First we sorted. Then a shredding company loaded its truck with my unwanted filing cabinets filled with paper, shredded it and disposed of the cabinets. I was lucky to have Annelies's help with this unpleasant task. We also made time for fun. For example, we took a forty minute Potomac River narrated boat tour from Alexandria to Georgetown waterfronts seeing and hearing about the monuments and other well-known Washington sights. I had never seen them from the river, which I have lived near for 48 years. It was a new, delightful experience in wonderful company.

Best wishes for the holidays,

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