

## Hugh and Becky Update November 5, 2010

Groetjes from The Netherlands,

We are really feeling like we have a home here in the Netherlands. That does not mean we have fully assimilated. Still so many things are still new, different, and at times, frustrating. But we are glad we are here. We'll try to catch you up on our activities with this update.



On Friday, July 23 (or as is done in Europe; 23 July) Hugh left California for The Netherlands. He started work as the Head of the Laboratory for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) the following Monday. No break, just jumped in with both feet. He had a week of overlap with Gary Mallard, who had this job just before Hugh. Gary and his wife, Phoebe, were a big help to Hugh his first week, just before they returned to Maryland.

Hugh only had what he brought on the airplane from California for the first couple weeks. Luckily, that included a collection of American “salty, crunchies” given to him by his colleagues from LLNL, along with a camping chair, TV table, and a few kitchen items. A few weeks later the air shipment brought much needed items and Hugh’s life got a bit easier.

On Wednesday, 4 August, back in California a transportainer was filled with our household goods for the sea shipment to The Netherlands.



Becky, with the help of so many of you, took care of a lot of details; had a successful garage sale, thanks to Cindy Atkins-Duffin; moved out of the house and stayed with friends and family; got the house rented; cats settled in with Greg Greenman, etc, etc. Of course, there were mix-ups, like Becky paying for a haircut with a check from an account she closed two weeks earlier – OOPS! (As you see below she asked for it cut so she did not have to find a hair stylist before she could speak some Dutch! She still has not had a haircut!)

On Saturday, 21 August, Becky flew off to join Hugh. Bruce Newcome, who made sure Becky got to SFO and took this picture, says Becky violated the rule that your luggage should not be larger than you are! Hugh met Becky at the Amsterdam airport in a joyful reunion.



Monday, 13 September a truck loaded with our transportainer arrived at Dokter van der Knaaplaan 9 in Rijswijk (that's the name of our little town, just south of The Hague).



We had warned the neighbors that the truck was arriving so they moved their cars, but they could not miss the fact it had arrived when, at 8 am, the movers banged on the customs-

issued security bolt with a 15 lb sledge hammer for about 5 minutes. They had to borrow a hack saw to finally get it off.



We are pretty well settled into our home. A few pictures left to hang and a number of other details but we are ready for guests. Just a few photos:





A pretty comfy home. Typical Dutch stairs are very narrow and winding. The ones in our house are no exception. We were lucky they got our queen sized bed into the second floor (or as the Europeans would call it, the first floor), over the back balcony railing, but the double bed did not make it to the third floor. Don't worry, we have a new IKEA bed up there for you when you visit!

Don't be fooled by all the cabinets and counter space you see in the kitchen. Only what was on the side where you see Becky in the photo was there when we moved in (well, there was some really cheesy stuff that would fall apart at a sneeze!) Our landlord agreed to go 50:50 on additional cabinets. Hugh spent an entire weekend assembling IKEA cabinets. Boy, was he sore on Monday. Then more time with adding hardware, making adjustments, etc. But now we have plenty of space!!



We really had an easy move. The Dutch "Removers" were really impressed with the packing, even after four weeks in transit. Only one wineglass was broken and that was when Becky dropped it.

We are becoming aligned with Dutch living. We both have proper Dutch bikes. Hugh commutes to his Lab on his bike. Since this picture was taken as he headed off one morning we've outfitted Hugh's

bike with panniers (saddlebags) so he can more easily carry his briefcase, lunch, rain pants and booties, umbrella, etc. Becky's panniers are often filled with groceries.

Hugh picked out a car in August, a Honda Jazz that in the US is a Honda Fit. After more than a month to process the paperwork we picked up it up about 10 days ago. They had to get special license plates made as Hugh is "corps diplomatique". It is very freeing to have such mobility. But really, the public transportation system here is pretty convenient and we use it about 90% of the time.

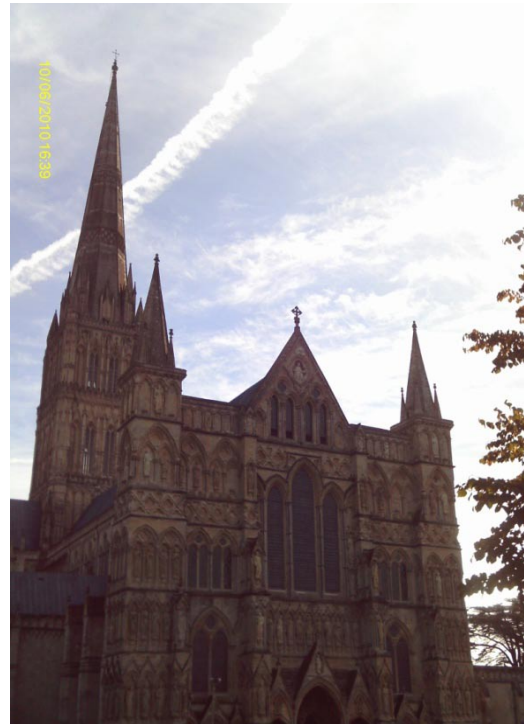
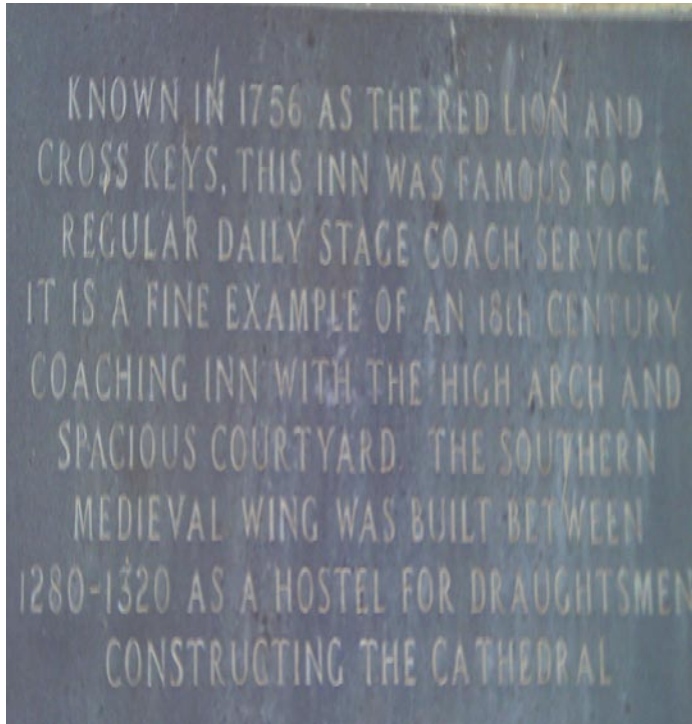
Hugh has not found the technical aspects of his job as challenging as the political and cultural ones. It is not the culture of The Netherlands but the culture of UN-affiliated organizations and the European work style. A few examples are responses to e-mails via formal letter that take days to get to you; working meeting rooms schedules with a D2 – that is the equivalent of LLNL's Associate Director; meetings on trivial subjects that are mandatory, even when they change the meeting time hours before the meeting was originally scheduled; waiting for weeks to get people to act on critical decisions; changing rules so that documents that worked six months ago must be rewritten and reapproved. He does have a number of improvements that have already taken root and plans for others to make the staffing more efficient and effective, especially when people leave and cannot be replaced for months!

In October, the OPCW had a major exercise in Tunisia. As part of the exercise Hugh took receipt of samples at his Laboratory after they cleared customs in The Netherlands. That included riding his bike to the Laboratory at 2:30 in the morning to meet the inspectors delivering the samples. Thank goodness the rain had stopped by then. Then Hugh had a quick trip to Washington DC, partially to witness delivery of those samples from the exercise to the Edgewood Lab.

We've only been here a short while but when Hugh was in Washington he had a list of things to buy that we can't easily or for a reasonable cost get here. Beware, if you come for a visit we might have a list of things to bring. Don't let that stop you from visiting! Don't worry we can get wine here, just caught a bottle and the opener in the picture. We do miss our California Zinfandels.



The first week of October Hugh had a business trip to England and Becky tagged along. Quite nice weather. We stayed in Salisbury at a neat older hotel with lots of history. Also loved our tour of the tower of the Salisbury cathedral, constructed in the 1200s.



Last weekend we visited the regal Palais Het Loo. Built for the Dutch royalty in 1636 it was their main country home until the mid 1970s. Now it is a national museum. See [www.paleishetloo.nl/](http://www.paleishetloo.nl/) to see it in all its glory.

We have gotten together with Pete and Pat Aiello, friends Hugh first met in graduate school at Michigan State. They live east of us in the "center" of The Netherlands. They had their first "expat" experience in Tokyo so The Netherlands seems easy to them.

Fall US traditions - Dutch style --- HURRAY for the San Francisco Giants winning the World Series. Weird to watch it from here. We saw the games about 15 hours after they were played. ESPN showed them with no breaks between innings, cut out time for pitching changes, very few reruns. You'd miss something if you went to the kitchen for a beer! But it was glorious to see the decisive win. Halloween night we had three trick-or-treaters. They did not know what to say when they rang the door bell. Just held out the pillowcases they used as candy bags. I think I gave them plenty of candy to make it worth dressing up like a witch, a cat, and a pirate. Over the Thanksgiving weekend we'll go to Brussels with Pete and Pat. Unlike most of you Hugh and Pete will work on Thanksgiving Day, as well as the following Friday. Hugh and I usually went out for Thanksgiving dinner so we'll probably keep that tradition, just unlikely to have pumpkin pie. We could probably go Christmas shopping on "Black Friday" without a crowd. Don't think we'll send much back to the USA this year as it will cost more to ship than to buy.

We are having to do research and learn how to live these new lives we have started. Thanks to Rod Fite we have research material in English.



Seriously, it takes a lot of time and research to figure out how to do the most basic things. For example, there is no such thing as a paper check. So to pay for our car we had to request they up our debit card limit to the right amount and then reduce it again. Of course, you can't do this on the phone and since we are "US Persons" we have to go to the downtown branch of the bank for such transactions. Things just take longer!

And what has happened here! They really do have storks here and they deliver babies, don't you know so, this is the symbol for a new arrival!



Becky is becoming active in the American Women's Club of The Hague. This club has been a positive part of the lives of American expats for the past 80 years. The US Ambassador to The Netherlands is the honorary president. There are fun activities, times to just sit and chat, and people who understand and

can guide you through the expat experiences. Becky's used her experiences from the LLNL Women's Association to help organize the used books for an upcoming fundraising book sale. Becky got a reference from a new friend from the club for the accelerated Dutch language classes she starts 15 November.

It has been really hard to not be able to communicate easily. Most Nederlanders speak English but there is always that barrier. For example, official mail comes in Dutch and sometimes Hugh has taken it to work for translation; Becky stood in front of the dryer with the Dutch dictionary to understand that the "zoemer" is the buzzer. Becky got better at counting from the classes at her gym, "Acht meer crunches, acht, zeven, zes, vijf, vier, drie, twee, laste!" Hugh has it easier in this respect since all the work at the OPCW is in English. We've found ourselves saying "Ja, ja" even when we are not sure what someone just said to us. Really dumb when what you thought they said was "Did you sleep well?" and they really said "How did you sleep?" Be kind to foreigners in the Bay Area!

We are getting used to the weather. You just plan that it might rain, wear the right clothes, wait out rain squalls over "een kopje koffie" (say it out loud and you'll get it), leave early or late to avoid the rain, etc. After one cold spell it has been quite pleasant temperature for fall. In fact, right now our temperature is warmer than Livermore, but there is a nine hour time difference! Livermore is predicted to get into the 80s, that would be a summer heatwave here. If you ever want to see our weather go to <http://www.weer.nl/nl/home/weer/wereldweer/actueel-en-verwacht-weer/stad/31X3735/rijswijk.html> It is one of our most visited websites, that and "translate.google.com"!

The Christmas holidays are right around the corner. On 13 November Sinterklaas (think Santa Claus) arrives at the harbor near Den Haag on his steam boat, the SS Madrid. He is coming from his home in Spain(!) with his white horse, Amerigo, and his assistant, Swartz Piet (that's black Peter). He will have a parade from the harbor into downtown. The parade will have a large number of Dutch men dressed as Swartz Piets, including the black face. No issues here because Swartz Piet helps Sinterklaas deliver the candy, kruidnoten, and presents on 5 December. We plan to go to the parade and Becky is delighted to have one more day when gifts are given and received! We have Christmas lights from Gary and Phoebe and brought Christmas decorations. Have to figure out when to start the decorating.

Lots of other fun things in the near future. Hugh's oldest niece, Helen, will be our first overnight guest. Looking forward to her visit. In the near future Hugh will have business travel in Sweden and then Switzerland. Becky goes off to visit the Christmas markets in Nuremburg with some ladies she's met. We plan to stay in The Hague for the Christmas holidays. There is a possibility of a trip to Singapore in early January. Becky may do some consulting for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization after the first of the year. Not certain but likely. We have visitors planned for your President's Day weekend (another holiday not celebrated here!) Yes, exciting times ahead.

We miss each of you and talk about our memories of you fondly. Your e-mails are always a welcome treat. Please share this update with anyone who may want to see it and if they send us their e-mail address, we'll add them to the update list.

Best wishes, Beck Failor and Hugh Gregg

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