

Harriet Report #5 – Life Continues After He Asks For Divorce

October 6, Friday, 2000 – Harriet's Report on zoo, dinner, do, tub, storm, museums, taxi, phew

Here's something I hope is interesting to note:

DO NOT WALK OR RIDE YOUR BIKE THROUGH DOG DO

Do not walk or ride your bike through dog do, especially if you keep your bike inside your house! It is not easy to get off the wheel if it's squishy dog do that wraps around the edges of the tire. If it's hard dog do and only goes on the outside treads, it's easy-ish to rub or ride off, but if it wraps around the tire, it's a pain.

I put the dog do first to try to get your attention, but on re-reading it, realize that it might turn you off. The bath tub thing is only sort of interesting, but you might like the day in Amsterdam report a little farther down...

BATH TUB SLANTS DOWN HILL

We make sure our bath tub/shower slants down hill so it will drain completely. Our claw footed tub here didn't have the right slope. In August when we moved in I noticed the perennial puddle in the back of the tub, but I preferred to fix it without involving Adrian the landlord who is so sweet but sort of bumbling. I wanted to fix the tub slant, but I didn't have a plan or any strong enough reason to bother, yet.

Of course a stain, black and nasty looking, began around the edge of the permanent tub puddle. And my clean precious boys took baths in the tub with the nasty stain. So I sprayed the evil stain with some stuff that says "shower somethingdutch" and has a picture of a shower on it. The stain liked the cleaning spray and thrived, growing bigger and blacker. How many weeks would YOU let this go, two? three? Well it was six weeks before motivation really hit.

First of all, the spray cleaner was for white lime deposits, not black bath tub stains. You see, I'd finally made a sort of friend, Sanne. She came over for coffee and told me all about cleaners. This is not normal and it's not that she's boring, I asked her all about cleaners, and even shared the nasty black tub stain with her. Thank you Sanne for your patience! She started laughing at my white lime cleaner. It was my moment of understanding.

While she was still here, we went to the attic room where the construction debris is and found a half box of ceramic tiles that match the bathroom floor. So of course we went directly downstairs to drink more coffee. A few days later, I brought down four tiles. I tried to lift the claw footed tub, it lifts easily but of course is heavy. This job would need a lifter and a fitter underer which equals two people.

So I told Alex "we have to fix this now, please". Then I went downstairs to make breakfast. I could hear Alex talking to Peter. Peter came down for breakfast. Later, Alex came down. I asked "Is the bathtub done?" He said "yes". I went up to see if it drained completely and saw that he and Peter had only put one tile under each foot. Humm.

"It needs two tiles under each leg" I told Alex. He said fine and did it. Now it drains like a charm. I soaked that baby in bleach type cleaner recommended by Sanne and now I can be happy to have my boys naked bottoms in that tub, and guests too, if we had any.

But the most "I love lucy" part was when I took my shower. I was the first one to use the tub after the tiles were inserted under the two feet. I got in the tub and I heard this horrible loud grinding crunching sound like the pipes were going to explode, so I quickly turned off the water and standing there cold in the tub, yelled to Alex "what's wrong?" He came right away, but I was getting out by then. We could see the tiles had cracked from the pressure of being two tiles high with no buffer between them, and of course I was the heaviest one who would use the tub.

So he told me to climb back in and stand in the back corner to break the other tiles and get it over with. It was scary but it worked and now the tub is stable on those broken tiles. It's been about 9 showers since and no trouble?

INTRUDER IN ATTIC

OK, so maybe that's not so interesting. But try this: There was a giant intruder in the attic last night banging the door and smashing things on the floor. I was so scared that I jumped out of bed and yelled for Alex that something was wrong in the attic. He sat up, white and naked, "what, what" and I said "please go in the attic and see what is wrong". He went slowly up the stairs, looking around. I retreated to bed and warm covers after I comforted Peter that I wasn't calling for him, I was calling for Alex. When Alex returned he said nothing was wrong! It was just the noise of the hail on the skylights. Well yeah! It was storming like a fiend. Lightening hit the house this morning, at least it seemed like it based on the thunder!

ON TIME FOR DINNER

We had an invitation to a Dutch home for dinner. [This was the day Alex said he wants a divorce.] Promptness is a famous value of the Dutch. Dirk, the husband was very kindly going to pick us up at 17:00 so we wouldn't have to ride bikes 8 kilometers somewhere we'd never been in the dark.

But Adrian the landlord was needed to come show us how to fill the furnace thing in the attic and it had an electronic readout on it that said "fill, fill, fill". And of course Adrian came over at, you guessed it, 16:45. And he didn't know how to

fill the furnace thing. He laughed about not reading the instructions. I told him there were none. He didn't hear. Alex told him there were none and he said "oh really?".

First Adrian tried to pull the front of the furnace off by yanking harder and harder on it. I said, "Adrian, it's brand new. If it was supposed to open, it'd be easier than that, please don't break it!". He heard that and looked to the side where there was a convenient hose coiled up and a nozzle to fill the furnace thing. What do you know!

Then the front door buzzed. Damn! I wanted to have everyone ready and waiting on the street for Dirk to pick us up! It seemed so rude to make him find a parking spot and come in. And now he'd have to wait until Adrian finished at least showing us how to do it for ourselves later, because I didn't want to take the time to actually do the complicated filling. I tried to hurry poor Adrian, but it was too late, Dirk was already upstairs in the attic with Alex and Adrian. So all three men could enjoy figuring out filling the furnace thing together.

And then I got to feel guilty for trying to rush Adrian when I got downstairs and saw that he'd brought us a big bunch of home grown hydrangeas. What a good hearted guy!

Ok, it worked out. Dirk wanted to meet Adrian anyway because he thought he might have been his classmate at the University. So Dirk got to check out Adrian and he wasn't the same guy.

Then we got our first Dutch social engagement, a very pleasant dinner at Margreet and Dirk's house in a suburb of Rotterdam. They invited their neighbor's to have drinks and hor d'oeuvres and to talk to Alex about running and marathons. Margreet had found a game that didn't require knowing dutch for the boys to play, which interested them less than six minutes. I let them watch TV during the grown up drinks in the living room, but since the television was in the dining room, they couldn't watch during the grownup lingering at dinner. After about three hours there, Arthur ran around their home shouting "Ik ben bored" (I am bored). Alex let him have it the next day.

It was great to go out and have someone make dinner for us and do the dishes, and have a ride, and eat things cooked in an oven (we don't have one!).

FAMILY IN THE ZOO

Then the next day we took the boys by tram to the Rotterdam Zoo. The zoo had indoor parts which smelled painfully bad. Right at the front of the zoo and smelling fine in the outdoor air we saw penguins right where we could touch them, it was so cool! And in the back corner of the zoo there was a great net play ground that went up many stories and was directly beside the cafeteria so I could sit and have multiple coffees while Peter and Arthur ran wildly around

getting out excess energy. I ate kaas souffle which was fried cheese, just like in Wisconsin.

We looked at all the animals, but quickly. Arthur got bored at the zoo after a while. A big first for Peter was that he actually wanted to look at things in more detail. He's really growing up. It was a pleasant time and not crowded. The gorillas were really interesting and some of the antelope things had really cool horns. The penquins were the highlight for me though.

DAY IN AMSTERDAM, JUST MOM AND BOYS

That was Sunday, on Wednesday the boys took me to Amsterdam for the day. There was no school. If I didn't have their company, I probably wouldn't have bothered to go to the big city. We had a great time!

We had three goals: to find a meeting spot at the airport for Cynthia's arrival next week; to let me see some Van Gogh's at the museum; and for all three of us to enjoy the hands on science museum.

It's a one hour train ride, interrupted to stop at the airport. Goal one of airport meeting spot was met by choosing Burger King. Next goal was a little tougher.

One detail that took some extra effort was completing the boy's museum cards. Alex had bought them museum passes, but they needed a passport type photo put on them and then to be sealed shut with the provided sticker. We couldn't figure out how to put money in the photo booth at the Delft train station and after fighting with it and each other, ran out of time before the train came. But in Amsterdam Central Station the photo booth cost 8 guilders, not 4 like at Delft Station. As the booth shot a second photo of Arthur who had already jumped down, we realized for the 8 guilders we got two poses, so we could have done both boys on one try, but instead got one pose of Arthur and one pose of the empty back of the booth. Oh well, got the cards done.

The Van Gogh museum gave us a discount on audio tour's for having museum passes, and they gave the boys clipboards with kid quizzes in english about some of the paintings. Thank god for that, it kept them occassionally interested. I got three chances to see the art; one while they tried to answer the quiz questions, one very brief chance while they listened to parts of the audio tour, and one tiresome chance while they whined. I think they actually absorbed something from the quiz's forced looking, and at least they didn't chase each other or shout or scream, hooray.

So I got 67 minutes looking at Van Gogh's art and 48 minutes of off and on fussing in the Van Gogh cafeteria. That's seem pretty standard issue family time. They wanted plain noodles which had to be special requested, bread, croissants, soda, and ice cream sandwiches. I bought them all but the ice cream sandwiches. The pasta ended up having green specks on it which made it

inedible by child standards. The bread was a hit. Peter ate a banana and croissant. Arthur had the worst orange I've seen in years and didn't eat it, but enjoyed peeling it! My chocolate mousse was disgusting but I ate most of it anyway, typical fat girl behavior. I let them go back under Peter's guidance and get ice cream sandwiches while I drank the coke that Arthur demanded but wouldn't drink. I guess it was a success. Kind of expensive, but less than New York, only about US\$20 total.

We trammed back to the Central Station and then walked sort of the wrong way, definitely the longer way, to the science museum in a blowing drizzle, cold in my right ear. We got to cross a two hump arching pedestrian bridge that was really pretty. Even though the science museum didn't accept our museum passes, it was really worth it to go anyway. The boys had been looking forward to it and none of us were disappointed. It was easy to blow the next three hours there.

The only bad time was when I was absorbed on the second floor looking at a rock star photojournalism exhibit, and Arthur was on the third floor wondering where I was. He gave up and sat down in dejection at the top of the stairs and a nice worker lady asked if he was lost. He said "yes" and was on his way to the front desk with her when they passed near me and I said "Hi Arthur". He started to cry about how he was lost and it was so sad! We hugged for a while and then went upstairs together to do some engineering stuff. Later Peter and I left Arthur on the computer while we went to the roof. It was so scary! It was slanting, because the whole building is shaped to look like a ship's bow and the roof is slanting upwards. I felt totally out of balance up there and wouldn't leave the security of the elevator house. Peter loved it on the roof, but felt sympathy for my fear and let us retreat shortly!

Peter and I both wanted to go to the english language book store, but we didn't want to spend much time, so we had the front desk woman call us a cab. It was fun and very safe and luxurious and not that expensive. It was the same price for the cab as it was to call home and tell Alex we'd be late. Well, the phone was only so expensive because I bought a 10 guilder phone card that was broken and was too far away to return it, and Alex didn't hear the phone the four times we tried and when I hung up one phone didn't give us any change, so that was 16 guilders for phone, just like the taxi.

The book store was disappointing and there wasn't anything good for Peter to use for his race car report. But in the same block was another english book store and we found some things we liked there. There's always something to like at a bookstore, right? The street was just for pedestrians, filled with people, and lots of bright lights coming on in the dusk of rush hour. It felt so colorful and CITY! We stopped for pizza slices before we took the tram back to central station and found a fast train to Delft, getting home at 7:30. Plenty of time for bedtime, bath, and reading.

But, the next day after school, Arthur's substitute teacher said he didn't behave very well that day and he was tired! Oops! My fault for the full day in Amsterdam. But I don't feel too bad because I knew they absorbed a lot of great stuff.

Let's see. I told you about the scary storm (which moms at school assured me was totally normal), the dog do on my bike, dinner with Margreet, the zoo, the day in Amsterdam. After last night's hail, our canal was full of miniscule floating fluorescent green plants mixed with a little trash. Alex thinks the current had changed?

Next report needs to be about IKEA, going to Shoe and Heddy's house, and maybe the shelf in the toilet, but what's there to say about it?

Loving life in Delft. Friday, October 6, 2000 part of Harriet's Reports