

Three trip reports rolled into one: 2001.04.16 - 2001.07.06

I started the year with an esophagus that had been reattached to my stomach, but whose exit had a tendency to close up. It needed to be dilated twice in January and once in February, and I wondered whether organising such a long trip was not an act of irresponsibility: could I trust that the last dilatation would be good for at least 20 weeks? The surgeon Tim L. Faulkenberry made no objections and the gastroenterologist Tom S. McHorse practically ordered me to buy our tickets. In their judgements that it would be safe for me to go, they have been right.

It was a long trip but that was almost dictated by how my appointments were spread out in time: 24 April (Oxford), 23 May (Athens) and 28/29 June (Bonn). There was just no point in going back in between. I also had an invitation for later in April, say the 27th, in Lausanne, but I was afraid that accepting it would be too much for my still anaemic body and declined it; I did so with regret but when the time was there I was glad that I had done so.

Ria decided that we would fly to the Netherlands first so that the worst of the jet lag would be over when I had to perform in Oxford. I

decided that, because its personnel threatened to strike, we would avoid Northwest Airlines, and this ruled out our usual route via Memphis. We flew from Austin to Eindhoven (and back), changing planes in Houston and in Amsterdam.

We left Austin on April 16th at 12:35 and arrived in Eindhoven the next morning at 11:25. It had been an almost pleasant flight because all planes had arrived on time, we did not lose any luggage and I - on doctor's orders! - was not allowed to lift anything heavy, but the food that KLM served on the transatlantic flight had reached a new level of inedibility. In Eindhoven, Netty van Gasteren and Wim Teyen were at the airport to collect us; they took us and our luggage in Netty's big car to Nuenen where Wim's Golf was waiting for us on the driveway. Inside the house the first thing we did was turning up the thermostat of the central heating.

A few things I remember of those first days. At the Eindhoven Customs I had to open my briefcase to show that all my pills (which had shown up in the x-ray scan, and there were very many of them!) were legal medicines. When we said hello to our neighbours, they showed us the tv-program that the VPRO had devoted to me and that had been aired a week earlier. Many people would later comment on it; the VPRO had done a very good job.

On Saturday morning we went by train to Amsterdam, first to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our daughter Femke, to say hello to her husband and to renew the acquaintance with their two little sons. After that family reunion we went to our son Marcus, who lives in Amsterdam as well. After a nice evening in his company, we stayed there for the night; on Sunday morning, after breakfast, he gave us a ride to Schiphol, from where we flew to London-Stansted.

In the air I already realized that those few days in my fatherland had been enough to mix my feelings. The immediate cause was the deterioration of the railway system, which was threatened by strikes by way of protest against a change in the timetable. I remember a famous railway strike during WWII, but that was an act of sabotage directed against the German occupation. In the decade after the war, when the railway system, which had largely been destroyed, was reconstructed, it became an object of national pride and a railway worker who would have suggested a strike would have run, I think, the risk of being lynched. Times have changed and, as usual, it was not an improvement. Later I would learn a bit more about what went wrong.

Since flights can be delayed or cancelled, I think invited speakers should not plan a late arrival - though planning a quick departure is

okay - . So we flew on Sunday because the lecture in Oxford was on Tuesday. In Stansted we were met by a nice taxi-driver who took us to Blewbury, where we would be the guests of Richard & Norma Bird.

They live there in a lovely cottage, which is about 5 centuries old. Apart from the fact that its doors are so low that it is very easy to hurt one's head (what I did), it was a nice visit. The next morning, Richard had to be at the University very early and had left in his two-seater by the time we woke up. Before taking us to Oxford, Norma showed us the centre of the village - church, cemetery, pub and little streams with clear water, it was all there - ; we arrived in Oxford around noon.

That Monday afternoon and the next morning I talked with all sorts of people while Ria amused herself in town. Oege de Moor was very helpful in taking us to The Randolph - where we would stay one night for an appalling £170 - and at lunch to a deli; it was nice to meet him again. Monday evening - our wedding anniversary, but no one knew that - we were taken for dinner; besides Richard and Oege and his wife, I remember Joe Stoy and his wife and Jeff Sanders and his companion - we had met Jeff in Australia, I guess in Perisher Valley - . I don't remember the food, so that

must have been okay, but conversation was all but impossible: firstly we were sitting at a narrow, long table, secondly the acoustics of the room were atrocious.

The Christopher Strachey Lecture was on Tuesday afternoon from 4 till 5; the laboratory having a bedroom (!), I had been able to sleep earlier in the afternoon. The idea of giving the Strachey Lecture attracted me very much for we knew, liked and expected each other. [I consider my Distinguished Fellowship of the BCS one of my highest distinctions because I was allowed to share the honour with Christopher when the BCS created the distinction.] My lecture, I am sorry to say, was not very good. I had to address an audience of 180 people in a lecture hall with 120 seats, no microphone and no blackboard (!), but I think the main reason that my talk did not go too well was that I was still too weak. At 6 o'clock we were whisked away and taken by taxi to Cambridge, where we arrived 2 hours later at the new home of Sir Antony & Lady Hoare.

I left Oxford with mixed feelings. The Colleges, and even some female students, were beautiful, but my overwhelming memory is of a number of decrepit, obviously very miserable beggars, huddled up in porches, trying to stay out of the rain. And also the University

mixed my feelings. In private conversations I still met scientists, but when I met them collectively, they struck me primarily as members of a teaching body. And the whole place gave me the impression that the authorities have honed the harassment of intellectuals into a devious craft.

Our visit to Tony & Jill was very nice; it is always a pleasure to meet them, this time it was an extra pleasure because Jill took very good care of the recovering patient. One day they took us to Ely and I was very proud that I managed to climb the central tower - called "the Lantern" - of Ely Cathedral. The other day they took us to the heart of Cambridge; I had been there before, but for Ria this the first visit to Cambridge, so there was a lot to see. Tony showed us Microsoft Research where I met Roger Needham - none of the other employees I knew - and good old David Wheeler, who happened to be visiting that day. It was a pleasant surprise to meet him again; he seemed in excellent shape.

On Friday, Tony & Jill took us to Stansted Airport. The plane to Schiphol left on time and four hours after take-off I opened the front door of our house in Nuenen. It had been a most enjoyable visit, but I was glad to be home.

And then we stayed for more than three weeks in the Netherlands. On the 4th of May we observed the two minutes of silence in memory of the victims of WWII as part of a little open-air ceremony in Amsterdam, at which our daughter Femke sang in the choir; I had not heard her for a long time, and it was a pleasure to do so again.

On the 11th of May we celebrated my birthday, and we were lucky that the weather cooperated and we could sit with our guests in the garden. Femke and Marcus came on the day itself, Rutger (our other son) came the next day, my sister Anneke came, my brother Albert was in Southern France (and stayed there).

On the 15th/16th we had a reunion in Slenaken - at about the most Southern point of the country - of friends of my student days. We were 12½ couples and it was a pleasure to see that all present were in good shape (admittedly in some cases thanks to medical technology, but what do you expect? We are all in our early seventies.). In the mean time, the nice weather was gone again: already before dinner we had a thunderstorm.

On Monday the 21st of May we flew to Athens, where we were joined by Femke,

who wanted to witness her father receive an Honorary Doctorate. The ceremony was Wednesday, and we returned the next day, making our visit as short as possible. The point was that when we bought our tickets in March, the latest (and 3rd) dilation of the passage from oesophagus to stomach was only 5 weeks ago, nobody could guarantee that it would stay open, I knew from sad experience that blocking would require immediate hospitalization and I wanted to avoid Greek hospitals. (Just in case, I had a large amount in traveller's cheques - in Euros! - with me.)

The Greek hospitality was absolutely amazing. To give a few examples, when they heard that Femke would come as well, they immediately reserved a room for her as well, and they picked up that hotel bill too, and was quite thrilled to see that the Homeric tradition of the *ξενήτιον* - the gift that the host gave to his guests - was still alive: after the ceremony, Ria and Femke were called to the office of prof. Theodoros Apostolopoulos - the Vice-Rector of the Athens University of Economics and Business - and were each given a golden bracelet and some jewelry to hang around their necks. But I was most impressed by the subtle tact with which they took almost permanent care of us without ever imposing themselves on

us. That was something very special.

We arrived at 19:00 at Athens new airport, where Ria saw Femke and I identified Yannis Diamantis, who would collect us. We were joined by the driver of the car of the Vice-rector of the university. (The reason we were collected by two people was that the driver did not speak a single word of English; he was, however, a very competent driver.) At the Park Hotel, Yannis Diamantis handed us over to our official host, Prof. Emmanuel J. Yannakoudakis, Head of the Department of Computer Science and the man who would officially grant me the honorary doctorate. Yannakoudakis took us for a while to his home, where we were introduced to his family; then his wife joined us for dinner, which started after 10 o'clock. It was in the elite restaurant of an equally elite hotel, it was clearly THE place to have dinner. (It reminded me of Hotel "Beau Rivage" in Lausanne.) The food, by the way, was excellent. We had moved a time zone and so it did not bother us to come back in the hotel after local midnight.

On Tuesday morning Mr. Diamantis kindly showed us the Parthenon - that he must have seen before - and the museum next to it. I had not regained all my strength yet for I remember being impressed by my climbing of the

Acropolis. After we had seen enough boys with leprous noses and broken penes, we descended to "Plaka" where (after a considerable effort!) our guardian angel found a restaurant that served soup. After lunch, we returned to our hotel, where we had a nice nap, gathering strength for that evening's "Working Dinner."

That happening took place in some sort of cafeteria on the top floor of a university building. (The University was truly within walking distance of our hotel; that was very practical.) Well, we did not work and I hardly dined, for almost each dish - even the tossed salad - contained cheese. (But there was beer and all sorts of things to nibble on.) Upon arrival I had been introduced to each member of the faculty, but for the rest of the evening I only spoke to the people I shared the table with, so it was nice when afterwards, in the bar of the Park Hotel we were joined by a few faculty members. (Greek beer does, of course, not enjoy Budweiser's world-famous drinkability, but it can be drunk. Temke had it as well.)

Wednesday was the great day. Fortunately I had discovered in time that I had left my prepared foils in Nuenen and the University had provided me with blank ones and pens. I used Wednesday's free moments

to make new ones.

At 10 o'clock Maria Valiantza, Yannakoudakis's charming secretary, came to take us to the Museum. Afterwards we had a drink on a shaded terrace, where I took 3 very nice pictures (in order: Miss Valiantza, Femke and Ria), and then we had lunch on another shaded terrace, and there she did what Mr. Diamantis had done the day before: she did not only order what we had asked for, but a whole bunch of additional dishes we should try as well. Another aspect of Greek hospitality?

In the afternoon we rested for a while, and I made a few last foils. At five o'clock we were collected and walked to the University where two competing TV crews were waiting to interview me. When that was over, we went to the hall for the ceremony, which was nice; it was all done in Greek, so I shall never know what they told about me, but that did not prevent us from noticing that the atmosphere was both solemn and festive. And then I gave my speech.

For its preparation I had asked about the nature and estimated size of the audience, and whether there would be a blackboard and whether the audience would understand English. No, there would be no blackboard,

but my audience would consist of all of Greek Computing Science, so English would be no problem at all. People from all over Greece would come, and accordingly I prepared a technical/historical talk. But that turned out to be a mistake. The audience consisted for a sizeable fraction of 27 Bachelors about to graduate + their siblings, parents and grandparents, I dropped a joke and from the tepid reaction I deduced that my English was Greek to them. So I moved as quickly as possible to my more pictorial foils, and finished within 25 minutes, with the uncomfortable feeling of having short-changed the colleagues that had come all from Salonika. Then came the graduation of the 27 Bachelors; had I known this and that they would be congratulated individually, then I would have asked to join the line and shake their hands as well. After a "Gala Dinner" - well, not so very Gala - with the 27 Bachelors and their families, we were taken to (I think) St. George Lycabetus: first a church on a very windy hill, and then to a restaurant where they served us incredibly expensive ice cream. After Ria and Femke had been kissed by almost everybody in the company, we were seen to our hotel.

The next day, Femke left early in the morning, we early in the afternoon; the Vice-Rector's car drove twice to the Airport.

We have been in Greece to short to be able to interpret what we saw. On the streets of Athens we felt safe and the other people seemed to do so too, we did not see a single rifle and the police was fully occupied by the traffic, which was allowed to clog up the city to such an extent that we could not escape the impression that the current Greek government feels itself to be a well-established democracy. It was also clear that their dictatorship occurred in a not too distant past: at the academic ceremony, half the front row was occupied by top brass, all except one in full uniform, and it was revealing to see how much attention the TV crews paid to them. I don't think they were dangerous. [Once or twice during the ceremony I wondered whether, in reality, we were only playing our part in a Gilbert & Sullivan opera, and almost expected the singing to start.]

My economic impressions were contradictory. On the one hand it was obviously not a rich country, on the other hand the expensive shops and the Mercedes density gave the impression of a very rich upper class, or an upper class with lots of money to spend. I would not be amazed if expense accounts and budgets for representation were by our standards out of proportion. Perhaps this is only to be expected in a country that was recently controlled by dictators and tycoons.

Then, more than a month later, on 28/29 June, we had in Bonn the sd&m Conference "Software Pioneers". The acronym sd&m stands for "software, design & management" and is the name of a Munich software house with (I was given to understand) about 900 employees. I quote from the brochure:

"Today's young computer scientists and software developers don't know much about the roots of their field. [...] This holds as well for some of the young sd&m software engineers.

The sd&m Conference 2001 aims at filling this lack of historical awareness by presenting ground-breaking contributions to the development of software as a field of its own, authentically presented by the pioneers themselves."

(Had the composer commissioned to write something for the occasion been Modest Moussorgsky, he would have composed "Speakers at an Exhibition".)

The second reason for the sd&m extravaganza turned out to be that it marked the retirement of Prof. Dr. Ernst Denert, CEO and founding father of sd&m AG. He and Manfred Broj (from the Technical University Munich) had organised the conference, and they had done so very well.

The conference (for 1200 people) was in the old building for the Bundestag in Bonn, the

speakers were housed in Gästehaus "Petersberg" in nearby Königswinter. For us this was very convenient, we could make the trip between Nuenen and Königswinter in slightly over 2 hours. Not knowing how easy the place would be to find, we left in time and arrived on Wednesday afternoon.

Gästehaus "Petersberg" was a 5-star Hotel that used to specialize in foreign heads of state. (It was the "Reagan-slept-here" type of hotel.) On the day of arrival I got stuck in the elevator, Ria got stuck the next morning and, later that day, Tony & Jill Hoare would do so together. We had there dinner twice, and breakfast three times, and the food was excellent.

For the record I reproduce the speakers, their topic and the size of their time slot. Broy, who acted as master of ceremonies, had the program under perfect control: everything happened on time. Here is the schedule for the first day.

(15 min) Ernst Denert & Manfred Broy:

Welcome and Opening

(45 min) Ernst Denert:

The pioneers' influence on sd&m

(35 min) Friedrich L. Bauer:

From the stack principle to Algol

(35 min) Ole-Johan Dahl: Simula

(35 min) Niklaus Wirth: Pascal

- (35 min) Fred Brooks: OS/360
 (75 min) Alan Kay: Graphical User Interfaces
 (45 min) Rudolf Bayer: B-Trees and Codd's
 Relational Data Model
 (35 min) Peter Chen:
 Entity/Relationship Modelling

Sorry: the passing of the baton was the next day.

All this was followed in the evening by a reception, a gala dinner, a (very nice) performance of classical music and a very elegant procedure in which the parting CEO handed the baton to his successor. Ria and I were highly impressed by the tastefulness with which these festivities had been organised. When for the benefit of the younger generation loud music was introduced so as to make all conversation impossible, we could fortunately return to our hotel.

The schedule for the next day was as follows.

- (35 min) Edsger W. Dijkstra:
 Structured Programming
 (35 min) C.A.R. Hoare: Assertions &
 Program Verification
 (35 min) David L. Parnas:
 Modularization by Information Hiding
 (35 min) John Guttag: Abstract Data Types
 (35 min) Michael Jackson:
 Jackson Structured Programming
 (35 min) Tom DeMarco: Structured Analysis
 (35 min) Michael Fagan: Inspections

- (35 min) Barry Boehm: Software Economics
- (35 min) Erich Gamma: Design Patterns
- (25 min) Manfred Broy & Ernst Denert:
Closing and Farewell

I did not make notes and, after more than two months, most of what has been said I have forgotten, but I vividly remember Alan Kay's performance because it was so abysmal. He kept us 75 minutes waiting for his lecture to start; instead he showed us one long "demo" out of his "laptop", most of it so insipid that I blamed him for insult of audience. My impression is that, except for his own performance, he did not attend the conference.

Rudolf Bayer's talk was a little bit longer than the others, but that was probably because he also wanted to do justice to the contributions by Codd, whom reasons of health had prevented from participating. He was one of the few who seemed to be able to give a technical talk without suffering from "PowerPoint".

Unkel Fritz, who was in great shape, described the German compiler efforts of the late 50s, a topic perhaps too big for 35 minutes. Ole-Johan, Niklaus and Brooks spoke about topics they have been identified with for a very long time; each of them coped with

this problem in his own way. Ole-Johan and Niklaus aimed at a more technical audience than Brooks, but that was to be expected. I did not understand what Peter Chen was telling, but that was to be expected too, for I never understood "modelling".

Friday morning I filled the first slot (known in Marktoberdorf as "The Victory of Mind over Matter"); my message that "Structured Programming" had been more about reasoning than about eliminating goto's, easily fitted in 35 minutes. I was followed by Tony Hoare, who gave an absolutely beautiful talk. One of my American colleagues remarked afterwards to me that Tony's (legendary) mastery of English made him "green with envy". I wish the younger generation understood all the trouble Masters take to give their best: while sitting in the audience the previous day, Tony had been editing his text very carefully! I missed the talk by Dave Parnas because I had accepted to be interviewed; later I heard that this had been unfortunate as Dave had prepared to expose me to his disagreements with me. Thus an opportunity for fireworks was missed.

To John Guttag and Michael Jackson I listened with pleasure, and to Boehm, whom I don't know that well, with interest. DeMarco was a

slick salesman, but his saving grace was that he told the audience so himself (and warned it that slick salesmen were dangerous). I was surprised by the final attention he paid to "Extreme Programming". Fagan was a salesman too, but a less charming one and Gamma was the last speaker.

That evening (or was it the next morning?) the Munich employees returned with the specially rented train with which they had come. The speakers and their wives returned to the hotel, where we had the privilege of enjoying good food in good company. The next morning we found each other again at a leisurely breakfast, for which the tables had been set outside on a terrace overlooking the Rhine: a perfect closing for a lovely party.

For the sake of completeness, I mention another way of looking at the whole happening, viz. regarding it as a 16-fold confirmation of the ruinous influence of PowerPoint, for the less of it you use, the better your lecture. [For the record: all our lectures were blue.] Unwittingly, Manfred demonstrated that influence in his closing words by not referring to our "lectures" but to our "presentations". [In Austin I cannot avoid the depressing observation that all our faculty candidates

lack the courage not to use what in Micro-Soft's own terminology is "its presentation software".] The bloody electronics only encourage the next steps of the replacement of content by form, and as such contribute to The Great Educational Fraud (= GEF).

On the 6th of July, we flew back to Austin, another week later dr. T.L. Faulkenberry repaired my abdominal hernia: it was clear we were home.

PS. I did not mention it, but in Athens I was struck by the ubiquitous presence — with the exception of the University Campus — of priests of the Greek Orthodox Church. The other day I read that in Greece they don't have the separation of church and state. That was new for me.

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