

## Bonjour tout le monde! Joyeux Noël! ☺

I can't believe it's already December 2009! Time flies when you're having fun. We've been in Pézenas for four months now, and we're as happy now as we were when we moved down. The kids are become more confident at school, and we keep meeting more great people. Since the last newsletter we've been back to the Netherlands for a visit and celebrated Sinterklaas here in France. Now we are in the third week of Advent and are looking forward to celebrating Christmas, the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

We left for the Netherlands Saturday, October 24. It was a long trip, but in the end we made it to our friends, Peter and Carina and their three daughters. They opened their home to us for 10 days, for which we are extremely grateful. Stefan en I slept in their spacious attic room while Hanna shared a room with Naomi and Eline "slept over" in one of her best friends, Gabriëlle's room. We took shifts eating breakfast and pushed two tables together to eat dinner a few times together – 11 people around the table was special!



*We celebrated Joshua's 5th birthday at Peter and Carina's*

Peter and Carina and their children live in Ypenburg, our old neighbourhood, which was a great location to have as a home base for visiting friends, family and the church. Eline, Noah and Joshua were allowed to spend two days with their old classes at their old school. All three of them loved that. It was a great opportunity for them to reconnect with their old friends and talk as much as they wanted in their "own" language. It was almost as if they had never left. Noah mentioned that he loved playing soccer with his buddies the most ☺

We took the time to visit some friends and family while in the Netherlands. Regretfully we didn't have time to visit everyone we would have liked to. We'll have to organize an Open House the next time we're out so that we can talk with and share more with others. Because we stayed over two weekends we were able to go to our Home church two Sundays. Again it was the feeling as if we had never left. What a great feeling – to come home to a family like this. We were able to speak and share with a lot of people as a result. We were grateful for that.

Back from vacation life goes on. The children started back at their Dutch school, the *Watertoren* (Water tower) on a Wednesday. The children are doing really well in their French schools, but they really look forward to the Wednesday morning Dutch school. It's a time for them to talk and play with

Dutch children their own age and read and write in Dutch.

The teacher told us that Noah had been busy writing a long letter to the class assistant who was home ill. This was great news for us, because at home Noah hardly has time to sit down and write (he'd rather play than work). She has also told us that Joshua is doing really well with his reading. All three of the children had official reading, writing and comprehension tests in November which they did really well on. We feel it is very important for them to maintain their mother tongue, as well as their English and the French they are learning.

The *Watertoren* offers the children an opportunity to learn more about and experience certain aspects of Dutch culture. Some of the students have never actually lived in the Netherlands, one of their parents being French. So recently it was time to experience Sinterklaas. (for more info about that check out [www.thehollandring.com/sinterklaas.shtml](http://www.thehollandring.com/sinterklaas.shtml) ☺ ) We celebrated this traditional holiday at school and home. It all starts when Sint arrives in the Netherlands mid-November. As soon as this happens, the children are allowed to put their shoes out (at times parents feel are appropriate ☺ ) and see if Sint's helpers leave anything in them. Our kids loved running out to the shed in the morning and speculating as to whether or not a little present would be in their shoes. Saturday, Dec 5<sup>th</sup> is the official celebration. It's always exciting to see if Sint and his Pieten will come and bring any presents. We had a meal together and waited to see if anyone would come knocking at the door. At 7 pm sharp we heard a loud banging on the door and the kids raced to see if they could catch a glimpse of whoever had left these gifts behind:



*Presents from Sinterklaas!*

The kids were relieved to see that Sint could still find them, even far away in Pézenas!

The next afternoon we had a Sint party with the Dutch school and other Dutch and Belgian families who had been invited. It was a feeling of home that we really enjoyed.

As I said earlier, the kids are doing really well in their French schools. Of course it's still difficult, but, for example, Joshua's teacher told us that she is very pleased with how much French he is speaking in the class, with her and the other children. Eline and Noah's teachers are also very pleased with their progress. We are so thankful for the attention all three of them are receiving from their classroom teachers and the extra French teacher. They are speaking more and more French with their friends and teachers, and enjoy going to school.

Joshua told me the other night that he didn't want to have a holiday because that would mean he couldn't go to school ☺

Stefan and I are both looking for ways to earn a bit of extra money, but are not looking for any permanent jobs. Stefan has been busy cleaning up and fixing a few of the yards here in our neighbourhood, and spent some time installing plumbing to redirect the water pipes to our shed. That means our laundry machine can be set up there, freeing up kitchen space inside. He did an awesome job!

As far as work for myself goes, I am in the process of becoming a Tupperware consultant, focusing on the English speaking community here. In addition, I am registered to be an Usborne Book seller, and am waiting for my introductory packet of books. I hope to be able to sell to ex-pats and Francophones interested in English books, as well as some of the International schools here in the South of France. The search for a suitable space for music lessons continues – I haven't been able to find any yet. This remains on the top of my list. Hopefully I'll be able to find something soon!



*November in Barcelona*

We're also putting together a brochure with information about what our ministry here in Pézenas is – helping to bring people closer to God. When it is finished we will send it out to you if you are interested. We know that we can't start a church in the traditional sense right away, that we have to start small. We have so many ideas, and want to start!! That means that we have to be able to spend our time and energy working out these ideas, and not have to worry about how to pay for groceries etc. We have had quite a few reactions since our last newsletter: e-mails, phone calls, and a few financial donations. We are grateful and thankful for all of these, and want you to know that we really value your thoughts and prayers. The reality is that it is important for us to be able to focus on our ministry here. Will you think and pray about the possibility of supporting us financially? For example, \$10 dollars a month, or 25, 50, 100 or..? We all feel the repercussions of the global financial crisis which makes it twice as difficult to ask you this in December, a month which is traditionally more expensive than others. But if you think about the fact that every dollar will be used to reach people who have lost their hope in life, whose lives have lost their purpose, for those who are lonely.... We want to help these people, but are distracted with trying to find ways to pay the bills ourselves and don't have enough time to focus on helping these people. Our way of life is frugal, we are spending the holidays here to save the travel costs to the Netherlands, were fortunate enough to buy presents with our Airmiles

instead of cash, are not buying any new clothes for example. We have the heating a notch lower. Officially we need to maintain a reserve of two months, but we haven't gotten there yet.

If you are donating to our ministry already, will you please continue? Will you consider a bit extra? And if you haven't donated yet, would you consider starting?

We are EXTREMELY grateful for all of the donations we receive! It's hard for us to ask this, but I don't think we wouldn't if it wasn't so urgent. We don't want to leave here before being able to help those searching for the love of Jesus.

We love you and wish you and your family and friends a Blessed Christmas and a Happy and Healthy 2010! Keep in touch!

*Stefan & Rochelle*  
*Eline, Noah, Joshua en Hanna*

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