

WEDDING IN FRANCE*By Rita Somsen-Schuurman [409]*

*In the Loire area in France, about 160 miles southwest of Paris, there was a joyful wedding party this summer with a reception and parties in the wine cellars of **Domaine Buisse**. One could call it a celebration of European unity, for Bart Somsen [437] from Eibergen married Sarah Buisse [4777] from Montrichard in France.*

Bart's mother, Rita Somsen-Schuurman, tells us everything about it in her diary report:

How does a Dutch boy from Eibergen, who lives and works in England, find a French bride?

Our son Bart goes to Hull, England, for his study at the university of Humberside to proceed to the degree of MBA.

His preference for England (playing golf) is a known fact in our family, so it stands to reason that he is also trying to find a job over there. In Dunstable he finds a job at an international marketing office and he also gets to know Sarah in Dunstable, who works there as a French teacher at a comprehensive school.

This is how it started...

In October 1999 they were engaged to be married and then they also announced the day of their wedding: August 3 and 4, 2001.

The invitations are sent quite early so that the (Dutch) guests may take this into account in relation with their holiday planning.

We, Dick [408] and Rita, together with Hanny [396] and Ben [397], sister-in-law and brother-in-law, **leave for France on July 18**, each with our own caravan. Beforehand we map out a route. The trip is very successful, also because of Ben, whereas this is his first long trip with a caravan. Bravo!

The long and the short of it is that we arrive at our destination, Montrichard, as early as Friday. To the great surprise of Bart and Sarah who are in France

that weekend for the final preparations for the wedding. Montrichard is the place of residence of the Buisse family and there is also the camping site where the Dutch guests will gather.

On Saturday-afternoon, July 21, we get a guided tour of the vineyards of Paul and Claudine Buisse, Sarah's parents, and in the end there is wine tasting in their caves. In this way we can try to get used to what we may expect. Paul Buisse is a winegrower of a pure strain. His profession is his passion. In the evening we have a barbecue in their home. Delicious!

That week, prior to the wedding, the four of us make various trips to the beautiful castles on the Loire River, like Chenonceau, Amboise and Chaumont sur Loire.

On Saturday, July 28, our daughter Marieke [435] and son-in-law Henry [2068] arrive at the camping site in Montrichard together with our grandchildren. Marjolein [4017] of three and Derk [4412] who has just become one year old. He has got chicken pox and looks like a currant bun.

On Sunday we went to church service in the church of Ste.Croix where the wedding will be celebrated. On that occasion we also make the acquaintance of Père Dominique, the priest, barefoot in sandals, dressed in his black cassock. On Monday our daughter Hanneke [436] and her friend Mart arrive in the course of the day. And in the evening while we are having dinner my sister Erna and my brother-in-law Henk Westerveld from Dinxperlo arrive. They visit us, as usual, on their bikes.

The next day a lot of work has to be done in the caves. All the wedding-guests will receive a bottle of wine. It is our task to fold the boxes, to label the bottles and finally to decorate the boxes with a bow and a sticker. Fortunately Hanneke and Mart assist us; otherwise we would still have been tinkering on Friday.

The increasing number of guests arriving shows that the party is drawing near. On Wednesday-evening all the Dutch wedding-guests are present at the camping site. And we spend a lovely evening together until deep in the night!

On Thursday we go, as appointed, to the caves to assist in decorating them with balloons. Rita [410] and Lidy [3884] spontaneously offer their assistance. Wow, they will never forget. Sarah had

bought so many balloons that it would have been quite well possible to decorate the whole of Montrichard with them. Fortunately Marieke and Henry and their kids drop by so that Marieke has an ample supply of balloons for the first few years. At five o'clock we are totally fed up with balloons! In the evening we have dinner outside in Montrichard, together with the very young ones, Paul and Claudine Buisse and the bridal couple. There is plenty of wine. Fortunately we can go back walking to the camping site.

Then it is Friday, August 3. The party can begin. Paul and Claudine Buisse have invited us to a festive lunch in the caves together with the employees of the Buisse wine house. It is extremely enjoyable. Monsieur Baquer, one of the oldest employees, sings a beautiful ballad that we do not understand very well but that sounds wonderful with its resonance in these caves.

Then it is time to change for the ceremony in the town hall. Monsieur le Maire, the mayor, will personally perform the marriage. A large crowd is already waiting for us at the town hall. There is a vast majority of Dutch by now. The mayor is decorated with a beautiful sash. As a registration officer he might come over to Holland to learn a few things. Hanneke, the bridegroom's sister, and Rita, sister of the bridegroom's father, are Bart's witnesses. They are permitted to sign their names but it almost impossible for Hanneke to read a Dutch translation. It is all quite chaotic, really French.

After the town hall we go to the caves where the reception will be held. That is very nice indeed! Of course there is plenty of champagne and wine. During the reception three very special bottles of wine of 15 litres each are going to be opened: *l'Exceptionnel de Paul Buisse, 1998 Chinon*. There are many very special snacks. There is a band playing very nice jazz music. Marjolein and Derk are also having a good time. Little Derk is a real womaniser with his large brown eyes. Every woman goes down on her knees for him. By 10 p.m. the reception is over. We return to the camping site where we sit together with a large group of relatives and friends under the awning of Hanny and Ben's caravan. We talk until deep in the night.

Saturday is the day of the blessing in the church.

First we drop by at the caves to collect the remainders of the reception snacks. At the camping site we have put all the tables of the Dutch guests together and we all have a delicious meal. That is what can happen at a camping site. Just great.

In the course of the afternoon we go to the home of the Buisse family where we join the other members of the family to go to church. Never ever have

Bridal couple: Bart en Sarah Somsen - Buisse

we experienced such a chaotic distribution of seats in the cars. In the end Bart, the bridegroom, still has no seat in a car. For that matter, he did arrive at the church.

There are many onlookers. The French simply bring traffic to a standstill for a while. There are thirty-three steps leading up to the church of Ste.Croix. It is quite impressive. It is a very old church; in 1476 Louis of Orleans was married there to the daughter of King Louis XI.

The church service now is very impressive, not in the least because of the contribution of Lidy. Her three solo songs, so beautifully sung, noticeably move both Père Dominique and the other French guests.

After the church service we go to the Castle of Beaulieu in Joué les Tours, where the party will be held. *Beaulieu* lives up to its reputation. It is beautifully situated in the middle of a park. The bridal couple with champagne welcomes us of course.

Ben has taken some fantastically beautiful pictures of the couple in the church.

By 21.30 we sit down to dinner. Each table has the name of a kind of wine made by Paul Buisse. For

example: the *Touraine Primeur* table, or the *Christal Buisse* table. The seating plan at table is such that all the Dutch-speaking guests sit together. The dinner is delicious! The helpings are not too big, but there are many courses. As may be expected, the number of French guests at the party is very large, but as a counterbalance the Dutch guests hold an old-fashioned polonaise, in which Père Dominique spontaneously takes part.

It is already past twelve o'clock midnight when all the guests are invited to go outside to enjoy the garden illumination. To the surprise of everybody we can admire a really fantastic firework. Amazing! In the large that has been put up next to the dining hall there is a lot of dancing.

It is customary in France that music and dancing continue until six o'clock in the morning. We cannot make it that long. At three o'clock we go to our hotel rooms. Too tired to stand upright.

The next evening we have a party with all the wedding guests and other camping guests to finish the left-overs. We empty all the half filled bottles. Very great. Even little Marjolein may come out of bed; she hears that a party is going on.

Monday: *partir c'est mourir un peu*, saying goodbye is dying a little.

It is getting quiet at the camping site. Members of the family and friends gradually leave. We take leave of Bart and Sarah and her parents.

The moment of hooking on the caravan and departure has come for us.

Just like the outward journey the trip home progresses smoothly. Our plan to look for a camping site for one night on the way home comes down to nothing. It is Ben's idea, to which we all agree, to drive home to Eibergen in one go. Of course we have several stops on the way home.

Two couples with two caravans park their holiday homes on their drives at home at a quarter past eleven. Tired but satisfied.

For Dick and me, and hopefully for all our relatives and friends, it has been a very special experience to partake in a French wedding ceremony. Together with Hanny and Ben it has been a very pleasant time. Thank you very much for that! Also many thanks for Hanneke and Rita who wanted to be witnesses for our son Bart. That was just great for us.

Relatives and friends:

Merci beaucoup! Au revoir! ■

*In front the maids of honour : Natacha, Morgane and Marjolein [4017]
l-r: Rita and Dick Somsen [409 and 408], the bridal couple Sarah Buisse [4777] and Bart Somsen [437],
the parents of the bride: Mrs. and Mr. Claudine and Paul Buisse*