

Happy New Year 2023, Greetings from Cat

On the last few days of 2022, I am sitting in a rainy Christmas in Vollezele, Belgium. The last few days I have spent sorting through photographs to make my traditional yearly photo albums, with actual photos glued in with other scraps. This is a time of reflection of the year that has passed, and I do treasure the real albums that are always so much more valuable than digital photos in the virtual clouds. I have not been out biking in a few weeks, due to the rainy and windy weather. I am happy on my indoor 'Bkool' trainer in virtual reality, climbing up a mountain in the alps, or watching a Netflix film.

I was happy to go skiing and visiting with my sisters in Sweden for a week in February. I was really looking forward to a 'back to normality' scenario after the pandemic. However, that is when Putin quickly put an end to that hope, with his invasion of Ukraine. I found myself in war in Europe, and this invasion of Ukraine with destruction and terror really hit me personally, and I felt very down and worried about the war, and I still do. Furthermore, all my plans to work further with calf health and antibiotic reduction in Russia were cancelled, and thereby a lot of my work planned for this year. I still follow the Ukraine war daily and by now has become acquainted with the various weapons and war maps... sad. sad, ...but I guess a 'normal part' of the history of mankind.



In Storhogna in Sweden with my sisters



Would you like kefir?

In the spring I was happy to finally do a little pilot trial of using raw milk kefir whey for piglets post-weaning, to support gut health and avoid the use of antibiotics in this difficult time of early weaning performed in conventional production. The study was performed as a veterinary student's master thesis at the Ghent University. The kefir supplementation did indeed work, it reduced diarrhoea and improved feed efficiency!



Eldrimner's raw milk project



Potential raw milk producer!

Then in the spring, the raw drinking milk pilot trial was finally launched by Eldrimner, the Swedish centre for artisanal food production. It felt good to start this project with 5 small farms in Sweden, to show that there are farm-based systems to ensure the safety of raw milk, so that consumers can get this raw natural non-allergenic milk directly from farms. I perform training and education, farm audits and follow-up, and hoping for future risk-based systems by food safety authorities.

In June, my niece Julia graduated, giving me another opportunity for some quality time with my sisters' families. Then my Marc and I were happy to finally have Melissa Etheridge perform her Europe tour (that had been postponed 2 years by the pandemic). This led us to the Weert and Groningen in the Netherlands, Bonn in Germany and Oostende in Belgium. Spring and summer, thereafter as usual filled up with biking, walking, running, vegetable garden, taking care of newborn duckling and chicks, milking goats and enjoying our wonderful planet.



Julia - graduated with top grades!



Ayam cemani hen adopting ducklings

In August, Marc and I finally attacked the Stelvio, Motirolo and the Gavia in Northern Italy. We stayed at a great bike hotel in picturesque little Bormio. These had been plans that were stranded in 2019, due to my bad bike accident. As I biked up the Gavia, I was a bit overcome by emotions of finally having managed that dream, and Marc bought me a t-shirt where it said 'Stelvio, Motirolo, Gavia - mission accomplished'.



Melissa, your European fans follow you!



Lots of climbing training in the Ardennes



On the Gavia!



Passo de Stelvio - 2758 meters high

The autumn thereafter became filled with many trips to various conferences, intermingled with a few private trips. First the World Buiatrics Conference (cow conference) in Madrid, thereafter a virology conference in Ghent, thereafter a Veterinary Conference in Kaposvar, Hungary. In October I went with my father on an 'active senior trip' to Crete for a week. Then I went to Gran Canaria for a colostrum conference. In December I made one trip to Jutland, Denmark, to work with salmonella control on dairies, and then a short trip to my sisters in Stockholm to take in that special advent spirit, that is only fully present in the Nordic countries.



Autumn refrigerator!



Riding camel in Gran Canaria



I am wishing for peace on earth, and freedom from wars and pandemics, and that all people are driven by love. Dear friends, I am wishing you a very nice, peaceful, healthy, prosperous, adventurous, harmonious, and beautiful 2023!

With love and hope,

Cat.