

Fedibblety

2019 Annual Report

AFTER a hectic year in 2018 with moving across the world and learning a new culture and language, 2019 found the Fedibbletys settling into their life in Germany a bit more. Once again our predictions from a year ago were spot on – Rob now works at Cerence, trying to get your car to understand you when you talk to it; Clare continues her research on enzymes, including mentoring an undergraduate and a conference in the Netherlands; Spencer is doing well in 5th grade at the Gymnasium (college-prep secondary school), and Meg is enjoying 3rd grade.

In the tradition of our annual reports, we once again provide a graphical data analysis of our activities – this year we have chosen to compare the length of each annual report we have published thus far. As you can see in Figure 1, there is considerable variation from year to year, though the trend seems to be upward.

First Quarter

The year began with a visit from the Dibble grandparents Ellen and Dave. We showed them a few of our favorite places around town, as well as some places we hadn't yet seen, including Monschau, a quaint nearby town famous for its glass blowing and mustard.

In February we celebrated the kids birthdays – this year was a combined party at the local swimming pool, Aquana. Dave and Ellen joined us for the festivities. Spencer had his usual ice cream cake, and Clare made an incredible rainbow cake for Meg.

As soon as birthdays were over, it was Karneval season in Aachen, one of the biggest holidays of the year. It starts the Thursday before Ash Wednesday and goes through Monday (with Tuesday a day to get over your hangover). There are many parades and parties. We checked out the scene in Düsseldorf on Saturday (along with a visit to the Neanderthal museum), Würselen on Sunday, and Aachen on Monday. The kids got a ton of candy from the many floats in the parades. Tuesday is usually a day of rest to get over your hangover.

Second Quarter

One thing we had feared about life in Aachen during the winter came true – depression. Aachen is at the same latitude as Newfoundland and the south tip of Hudson Bay, which means that in the winter months, it is only light from about 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

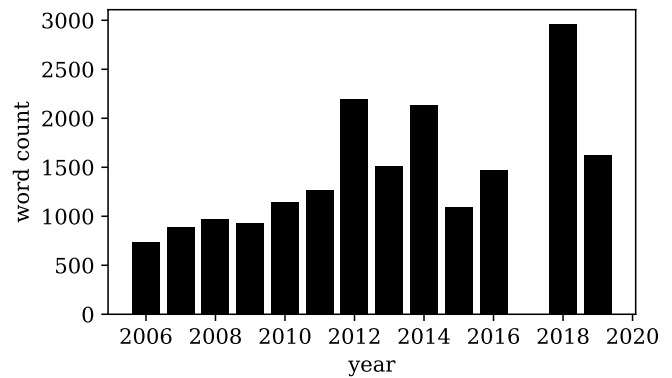


FIG. 1: Number of words* per annual report
* estimated

The lack of light combined with work stress due to the spinoff really started to hit Rob around March. Fortunately Clare was strong enough to keep us going, and planned some fun small trips for us during Easter break.

Our first trip was to Luxembourg and Trier the week before Easter. We were not expecting this near the end of April, but surprisingly we were met with snow in Luxembourg. We braved the weather in our spring jackets as much as we could to see the casements in the old city wall, and enjoyed heading down the outside glass elevator, but we didn't end up staying too long before we were ready to be inside. Thus we headed next to Trier, the oldest city in Germany, established as a Roman settlement in 16 BC. We visited the ruins of the imperial baths, saw an original Gutenberg bible, toured the oldest cathedral in Germany, and saw the iconic Porta Nigra. Clare and Rob enjoyed a brief date at a local wine bar near our vacation apartment while the kids enjoyed some time to chill.

After Trier we took a couple days to relax and recoup at home, then headed to Amsterdam for 4 days. Highlights included a picnic at the North Sea, seeing 6 million tulips (literally) at Keukenhof, narrowly missing a Bach concert in the Naarden cathedral, touring the Van Gogh museum, and exploring the canals of Amsterdam by boat.

We took advantage of the many public holidays in Germany in May. We experienced our first circus ever on Labor day (May 1st) in Aachen, which featured holographic animals, vegan food, plastic-free refreshments, and incredible clowns and acrobats. For pentecost we headed to Nürnberg for several days to visit the Misofs, Kunerts, and Birkelbachs and visit the Bergkirchweih beer festival in Erlangen. Then for Corpus Christi we went to the beach in Belgium, where we met up with our friends Christian and Lena and their three sons. Between all these adventures, Rob spent one weekend with Meg camping with the German scouts, and another weekend with Spencer and his football team at a youth hostel.

Third Quarter

The Fedibbletys remained busy in July – Clare spent a weekend with coworkers in Copenhagen, then shortly thereafter presented a poster at a biology conference in the Netherlands. The kids kept busy with end of the school year activities. For Spencer, it was both his first and last year of elementary school in Germany. They had a big celebration with all the families, which included many tears. It is typical in Germany for kids to have the same teacher for first through fourth grades, so the kids create pretty strong bonds, which explains the tears; starting in 5th grade, kids go to different schools based on their ability.

Spencer and Meg attended the after-school program at the elementary school for the first 3 weeks of summer break, with a few days off while the Soule-Reeves family visited. We enjoyed catching up with them, and biking/skating around to various castles in the area. Then for the last 3 weeks we headed back to the USA for a whirlwind trip. We spent about 14 days total in Colorado, and 6 days in Michigan in the middle, and thoroughly enjoyed catching up with friends and family who we have sorely missed during our time in Germany. (Have we mentioned we have a very large guest room in our apartment, for those would like to visit us, wink wink)

School and work started again with only a few days to recover from jetlag. For Meg, it was pretty much old-hat, but for Spencer it was totally new. It took a couple weeks to get used to it, but he is now really great at looking at his schedule every day to make sure he has the right books; he has different classes each day of the week, with an A and B week variation, including new subjects like Biology, Physics, Geography, and Band – he is following in the footsteps of his father with the trombone.

Fourth Quarter

The fall of 2019 was quite temperate in Würselen, which meant great weather for enjoying Spencer's soccer games. The weather was also great for our trip to Sorrento, Italy over fall break. We were told repeatedly that Italy would not be warm enough in October by friends and colleagues, but they were all wrong. We went swimming at the beach just minutes from our balcony every day, and also had plenty of time for exploring the ancient ruins of the Romans at Pompeii and the volcano of Mount Vesuvius. We

also enjoyed a semi-private boat tour out to the island of Capri to see its beautiful cliffs and grottos. Last but not least, we truly enjoyed all the great pizza and gelato.

Just a few short hours after our return from Italy, Dave and Ellen arrived for a brief visit for the second half of fall break, which included a day touring Cologne, where we climbed the tower of the cathedral, and learned about the history of scents at the perfume museum (yes, Cologne is famous for perfume, aka cologne).

In November we celebrated St. Martin's day for the second time. Spencer was merely a spectator this year; we enjoyed watching Meg parade with her lantern, and sing songs about the generosity of St. Martin. We also celebrated Thanksgiving for the second time. This year we hosted our friends the Winters. The turkey I ordered from the butcher never arrived, so we ended up finding a frozen one, plus a fresh turkey breast just in case, so we ended up with lots of turkey! The Winters supplied several tasty desserts.

December was consumed by Christmas markets and Scouts trips. Meg was busy with scouts three weekends in a row! First was the winter trip, then a trial outing, in which she had to prove her skills to reach the next level, and finally the solstice celebration, in which she leaped over the fire as she was awarded her Wolfling badge. Shortly thereafter both kids competed in the annual swim meet (Spencer having just recovered from a bad cold). Then on the 21st we took the train to England for several days, mostly to experience the druidic ceremony at sunrise of the winter solstice at Stone Henge. We lucked out with the weather, and in spite of having to wake up at three a.m., it was a very memorable experience. We spent the rest of the year mostly relaxing at home as a family, and rang in the new year with Sushi and fireworks.

2020 Forecast

For 2020 we predict much of the same as 2019 – continuing to explore Europe as much as we can, and hosting anyone who cares to visit us. We also foresee more of our favorite daily activities, such as Rob walking to the bakery for fresh rolls, Clare walking to the farm vending machine for fresh raw milk and eggs, Meg riding her scooter to school, and Spencer riding the bus to his friend's house.

Wishing you an excellent 2020,

Rob, Clare, Spencer, and Meg