Season’s Greetings December 2011

Decorating the tree is always a highlight of the Holiday season and this year I got a little earlier start than usual—early as in 6:30 a.m. Everyone knows the tree cannot be decorated unless Christmas carols are blasting in your ears. This year, my family is very thankful to Pandora, Apple and earphones. Why? Well, if you would have looked through the window as dawn was breaking, you would have seen a bespectacled elf dressed in grey (this elf doesn’t own anything green) dancing, arms flailing trying not to drop the ornaments. And at the same time, lip syncing every word while reminiscing over each and every ornament, some evoking smiles and some tears. This scene depicts our year, a little bizarre, a little dancing, some tears and lots of smiles.

Nasr (Gidu) is back at work—ok, he never left work, but he is back working in at UCLA. He inherited a larger office so he refurbished, re-floored , re-computered and redecorated. Yes, folks, it does look beautiful. It also continues to look like he never does any work. The only thing on his desk is his large white computer and the magnetic perpetual motion toy that everyone loves to play with. That is it! I think there is something wrong when the desk is empty. It tells me that he doesn’t have anything to do—but he claims he is super busy with new projects on electric propulsion. According to Nasr, this what we used to think was science fiction, making space ships and rockets move through space for a very long time. Yes, he is a rocket scientist! Nasr can be a fun loving guy, but he has taken a new view of fun. He told me the other day that he wanted us to sit and relax and study grammar so we could be a little more intellectually stimulated. OMG! How many of you are already groaning with boredom over the thought of studying grammar for fun. Would someone please help my rocket scientist come up with “fun” things to do? All I can say is thank goodness he loves to travel. With a little help from the concierge in the hotel, we cruised the South China Sea at sunset complete with fireworks and floated over the top of cruise ships and the rainforest . The city of Singapore is an architectural dream—one everyone needs to see and experience.

Virginia (Teta) continues to be very busy and her desks-both at home and at work are covered with paper, books, several computers, yesterday’s lunch, and various other items. My desk says busy—it also says crazed and overwhelmed, but that is every administrator in the state of California. Oh, fund is a four letter word here—no one in the state has a fund for anything and it means more work for us all. Ok, I am off my soap box and onto my bicycle. Bicycling is one of my favorite hobbies and this year I did manage to stay on it-no major falls. You will see me cruising the foothills of the Santa Susanna Mountains in the northern San Fernando Valley on Rinaldi Street. My round trip uphill trek is about 10 miles long. I agree, ten miles is not that much, but that uphill push makes my cheeks rosy. Not long ago I was touring up the street after finishing about 8 miles and I came to a stop sign. I waited while this jogger who couldn’t have been older than 18 gracefully glided by me, not a drop of perspiration on her brow. I’m sure she felt sorry for the this old lady whose face looked as crimson as the metallic cherry red of the vehicles I like to drive, and she cheerfully rooted for me, saying “Good Job.” Little did she know that I could feel my heartbeat pounding in my eyes and I wondered if they were bulging out with each beat. Yet, with her encouragement I was able to keep going and made it up the last three hills (why is it uphill going home?). Nasr is creative when it comes to my birthday and this year was no exception. We ate on the 57th floor of the Marina Bay Sands Casino. Singapore is famous for its “blue sunset” and there is no better place to see it than on the 57th floor of this three towered casino with a large spaceship floating across the top. Yes, we ate in the spaceship. We watched the sunset move through so many shades from light blue to royal blue to navy blue to midnight blue. The food at the restaurant was a bit pricey, (damned expensive), but it was worth it. I told the waiter to give my compliments to the chef and suddenly he was in front of me so I could compliment him in person. I mentioned that it was my birthday so he personally created a birthday platter for me complete with chocolate, fireworks and song!

Amira, Matthew and Siena will soon have a new addition to their family. The little one is due in mid-December. No names on the horizon yet, but Teta cannot let the new baby feel left out, so I named her (temporarily) Orange Mango because her sister was temporarily called Banana Berry. We are just a bunch of fruits, but I think you better keep that to yourself. Matthew was helping Amira “nest” by remodeling, repainting and rewiring the family room (it’s really Siena’s toy room) to make room for the new baby. Thanks to both sets of Grandparents, Siena has a well stocked toy room, complete with kitchen, playhouse and bunk beds. Siena inherited the bunk beds that both Teta and mom played with as children, complete with new handmade sheets and hand crocheted blankets. When we had it set up we suggested she put her dolls in the bed, but she tossed the dolls across the room in disgust and insisted that her pink and white stuffed kitty cats were the only ones that were going to sleep in those beds. Kitties are Siena’s passion. You can get her anything as long as it resembles or is a kitty kat. She needs a real kitty, but the problem is that daddy is severely allergic to them. So, to all our doctor friends, do you have good suggestions to help with daddy’s allergy so Teta and Gidu can get Siena a real kitty. Gidu has resolved that Siena will be a great mathematician. How can he make that determination when she is only 2 ½ years old? Siena had difficulty saying Teta, so she called me “eta”, which according to Nasr is the Greek symbol for efficiency—she doesn’t waste time by adding the “T”. Therefore, according to his crystal ball, she will be a math genius. Of course with both parents being electrical engineers, his fortune telling may not be so far-fetched.

Adam and Oanh traveled with us to Costa Rica for Nasr’s nephew’s wedding. Costa Rica is a rainforest in the mountains. We rented an SUV and between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. we navigated over mountains, over narrow-not quite roads, through the jungle, and past the roaring ocean. Nasr drove, I stressed, Adam stressed and Oanh stayed calm—or at least that was the way it looked. By the time we arrived at the beautiful hotel overlooking the rainforest and the Pacific Ocean we were all ready to kiss the ground. If you ever travel to this gorgeous country, make sure you use their GPS—because it gets you where you want to be. The deluge of rain did not spoil the beautiful wedding—but now we all know why it is called the rainforest. Adam and Oanh are the adventurous ones. They decided to go zip-lining through the canopy of the rainforest. They were hanging on to tiny little ropes as they zipped over the ground hundreds of feet above it. Yes, they came back happy, but tired. Once they came back they had to rest. They were amazed that mom and dad could trek on the ground of the rainforest for many hours and then go swimming. They both decided we had more energy than they do. I think fear wears you out more than anything. Adam is learning four languages—no one can speak any of the languages, but we would be lost in this day and age without them. Adam is learning all the computer languages, C, Matlab, Assembly and VHDL. He will only be able to talk to robots with these languages, but who knows maybe we will all be talking to robots pretty soon.

Jasmine has the luck of the Irish! She loves to attend concerts, but Jasmine is not known for her patience to wait in line. She planned to get in line early and she did, but so did everyone else on campus. She waited a while and when it seemed hopeless that she would get a ticket, she gave up and left the line. She was feeling sad and hung her head. Boy, was she lucky she was looking down! Not 200 feet from the line was a crisp $20 bill just lying on the sidewalk, waiting for Jazz to pick it up. Now, she was much more creative with her money than I would have been. She walked up to the front of the line, showed the first one in line the $20 bill and asked if she was willing to give Jazz her spot for the $20. She was another college student so YES!!!! She was took the money, Jazz got in line and bought her tickets and went to the concert. For Jasmine studying biology has both its positive and negative aspects. She finds it very interesting, challenging and worrisome. According to Jasmine, she knows too much about bacteria and when she watches people make her lunches, she cringes and wonders if she should eat it. Yes, she does eat it, but examines every morsel before it goes into her mouth.

As we examine our year, we know we are thankful for so much—sometimes we cringe and wonder, but we enjoy and try to live life to its fullest. We are blessed with wonderful family and friends who give us so much happiness. As we move into 2012, we want to wish all of you a happy holiday, a merry Christmas and a healthy, prosperous new year.