Greetings! December 2014

Nasr has returned to the nomadic ways of his ancestors, the Awlaad Ali tribe. We travel from the scorching, valley, desert to the cool, refreshing, coast twice or thrice a month. And as nomads we found the therapeutic artisan wells of Carlsbad. They are highly alkaline and great for the body and all sorts of ailments—it is the water of Eden—or so the advertisements say. Yes, we found them, but I haven’t convinced Nasr that I need to partake of the water therapy, yet. According to Nasr, there are other forms of therapy I need more. However, if any of my family want to buy me a massage and some water, I will force myself to check it out. When I’m rejuvenated, I will let you know.

Nasr--way into senior citizenship—earned his fourth fellowship this year when he became a Fellow of the Materials Research Society. This is truly an honor as there are tens of thousands of members of this community. Not that I am saying I am proud of my husband, but very few people have the breadth of knowledge to be members of societies in four different fields and at the same time the depth to earn the fellowship in that community. Also, this year he has created new materials that rejuvenate themselves and applied for a couple of patents along the way. Nasr has re-discovered the sea. Ok, this is not the Mediterranean and the Pacific Ocean is a little colder, but he and Adam love to go boogie boarding and fight the waves. He told Adam that he hadn’t had that much fun since he was a kid. Adam believed him because his face was beaming with happiness. Gidu (Grandpa) is the granddaughter whisperer. No matter their mood, the minute they see Gidu they run and laugh for joy. It might be that they have him wrapped around their little fingers and he will do anything for them, or he just may have special granddaughter power. As most of you know, Nasr loves to clean. I might say he is a little obsessive about it—just ask his kids. On one of our jaunts to Carlsbad, Nasr was busily cleaning the pool because the wind had picked up and put a little debris in the water. When the loud thunder clambered down the golf course, Nasr was using the long, metal pole to meticulously skim the water His son, the electrical engineer, quickly got the pole out of the water and reminded him that there are times to clean the pool and times not to clean it. During a thunder storm is one of those times. He may be a rocket scientist, but he sometimes lacks a little common sense.

Virginia—not as old as Nasr, and I can’t count that high anymore—enjoyed a much overdue family reunion in Wisconsin this July. I am blessed with a great family, but NEVER invite them to your birthday party. Oooohh, I think they scoured every card shop to find the nastiest and funniest birthday cards and raunchiest gifts that they could find. If you want to laugh long, hard, belly laughs come to any Schink event and you will leave smiling and laughing all the way home. While in Wisconsin, we decided to visit our old Alma Mater-University of Wisconsin-Madison. You know the old adage, you can never go back—it is so true when it comes to your college days. I now know exactly how Rip Van Winkle felt. He only slept for 20 years, I was away for over forty-something years--no counting folks—and I felt as if I landed in a foreign land. State street is Yuppie—no more hippies and way too clean! At least, I found that the German themed beer hall in the student union had stayed the same—I think the “beer hall” will never leave. According to students during my time, beer is the best study drink. Do you think that has changed? We think that what we left behind will stand still as we move on. Guess what? It moves on and you can’t go back! We still love to bike, but with the nomadic lifestyle it has been hard to get biking. And besides that, Nasr does not want to put bikes on the two new cars and scratch them up. So..we have been walking. We walk on the beach, we walk next to the lagoon, we walk above the beach, we walk and walk and walk. I have a pedometer and use it to keep track of my required 10,000 steps a day. It is very easy to reach that number of steps while we are in Carlsbad. It is definitely more of a struggle in Granada Hills.

Amira, Matthew, Siena and Jada. Siena is already in kindergarten and Jada is turning three. We started the New Year with this wonderful little family in the “Bahamaths”, as Siena and Jada lovingly call these islands. They celebrated New Year’s Day at the Junkanoo parade. The colors of the outrageous and unbelievably huge feathery costumes that the Bahamians wore were a feast for the eyes—particularly at Siena and Jada’s eye level. They also saw a sea captain lift a shark out of the water and kiss it. Of course, this was after the girls fed the sharks some dog food. Jada, at two, was fascinated with the Jada-sized chess pieces on the outdoor chess board. She skillfully lugged the pieces from one corner to the next trying to come up with the best strategies to win. Her dad better watch out if she is a strategist at two, what will she be like at 16? As most mothers, Amira does not want to see her children grow up. After repeating that sentiment several times to her daughters, Siena started to worry as she approached her 5th birthday. In a worried voice, Siena told her mother that Jada could have her birthday, but Siena still wanted the party. Amira quickly edited her comments to say, that Siena could turn 5, but not six. Any bets on how Siena is going to deal with it next year? It is amazing the kind of information that kids retain when you don’t realize it. Jada is listening and learning about the world. After hearing that their favorite cartoon character is from South America, Siena wanted to know where South America was located. Two year old Jada kept repeating “Ball, ball, ball.” Amira didn’t know what she wanted. So, tired of waiting for her mother to understand, Jada scurried into their playhouse and pulled out a small globe so mom could show Siena the whereabouts of South America. Is Jada prepping to be a world traveler? Amira tries to steer her girls away from make-up, but when Teta (Grandma) is around, they have found a sure fire way of wearing lipstick. Just kiss Teta on the lips and they can sport bright cherry red lipstick. You probably have figured it out that Teta encourages it so she can get as many kisses as possible. The only problem—white dresses and red lipstick—sorry Mom! Amira and Matthew were window shopping one day and spotted a Maserati on display. After a few calculations, they realized they could either lease FOUR Maserati cars a year, or pay for the cost of childcare. What would you do?

Adam, Oanh, and Olivia. Our red-headed Olivia is lucky because she gets to spend more time with Gidu. Whenever Gidu is around, ALL the rest of us are chopped liver. Adam and Oanh decided to teach Olivia sign language. I admit, I rolled my eyes and said, oh these young and foolish parents. Error! Error! I was wrong. I was very wrong. This little girl could communicate her needs and wants to her parents and grandparents and wow—so much less crying—both parents and baby. When she wanted her beloved toy cat, she signed cat. If she needs milk, or her diapers changed or water or food, she signed it. Now, she is talking up a storm and uses sign language when we have a hard time understanding her. Luckily, Gidu and I get a chance to spend more time with her, so on an excursion to the mall we were window shopping. Olivia loves shoes so she was on a mission to find the best shoes and of course she spies the Michael Kors store. She quickly scurries into the store, takes a hurried glance around the store and then flits out the door in seconds. She caught the attention of the sales clerk who smiled and murmured good bye as Olivia rushed out. Olivia, not wanting to be rude, twirled around and went back inside and waved goodbye. Then she grabbed my hand because she had places to go and people to see. Adam, Oanh, and Ollie go for bike rides, too. Well, Olivia rides in the Ollie Trolley for 7 or 8 miles while Adam pulls her behind him. Oanh and Adam are both very busy with work. Adam has opened up a new office in a Westwood high-rise for DMS. His view is pretty spectacular. While Adam was on a trip, I helped Oanh with Olivia because nurses have to be at work very early—before child care opens up. Now, I can really feel for young mothers. When you have to get yourself up, dressed and fed, and then get the child up, dressed and fed, and then take the child to childcare BEFORE you are able to get to work, is HARD WORK!!!

Jasmine is living in Washington D.C. completing her final year of graduate school. (Yippee-mom and dad will soon have some expendable income, again.) Studying Public Health is very different from all her biology work at San Diego. She called her dad and told him that she missed calculus and physics. I think she just missed the time she spent going over problems with her dad. Jazz moved into a new apartment this year. When Nasr and I were in graduate school, we did not have a gym in the building, conference rooms, special guest rooms or a concierge in our apartment building. We were born 40 years too early! Jasmine has the traveling bug in her this year. I think she is trying to visit every state before she graduates or at least before she has to foot the bills for it. She has traveled to Chicago, Sioux Falls, North Dakota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Florida, Michigan, and California. Yes, she is full time student! On one of Jasmine’s excursions to California, she and I went hiking in the Santa Susana mountains behind our home in Granada Hills—literally the hills behind us. Jazzy hikes very fast, at least according to Mom who was huffing and puffing up the steep, two mile climb. Are you impressed yet? (Ok, Jazzy had to slow down a bit for mom occasionally, but I made it to the top.) Along the way, we saw a deer and a coyote that was the size of a wolf—Jazzy insists it was a coyote—all I know is that it was a good thing neither of us was wearing our red riding hoods. Then on the trail we came across the most alien looking bug I have ever seen in my life. It was two inches long with a huge, bald, head with bulging eyes, and a pink slimy body covered in prison stripes. I know people think Californians are all strange aliens—maybe this is how all Californians start out. Jazzy kept bouncing along down the hill and luckily I had my dad’s cane as a walking stick. It saved me from a sprained ankle. The next day Jazz was up to climbing the mountain, again. I passed, but 30 years ago I would have beat her to the top. We continued our trekking in D.C. In one day, Jazz and I walked 10 miles. Maybe we should prepare for a half marathon.

As we continue our marathon long, nomadic, journey into the New Year, we hope each and every one of you finds great happiness and superb health in the coming year and beyond. Happy New Year!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!