December 2015

Greetings to all our family and friends,

2015 has been a year of new beginnings and endings. We moved to the new house in Carlsbad and ended a long stay in Los Angeles when we sold our home in Granada Hills. Our new address is 7314 Golden Star Lane, Carlsbad, CA 92011.

Nasr loves being so close to the sea, so we take long walks along the rustic Batiquitos Lagoon and on the lively Carlsbad Strand overlooking breaking waves and sun-bleached sand. Yes, it is as relaxing as it sounds. He also gets lots of exercise by going to the gym almost every day. If you haven’t seen him lately, he has trimmed down to an even more handsome man. (I might have a bit of a bias on that.) This may sound like a quiet idyllic life, but Nasr still needs to commute to UCLA. Now, this is where it gets a little hairy. Yes, there is a train that leaves Carlsbad and gets to Union Station in Los Angeles in about two hours. The train is comfortable, he can sit and work and make use of the time. The issue is getting from Union Station to UCLA. That takes one and half to two hours, also. So, quite often the round trip commute on one day is between seven and eight hours. How many of you have a seven to eight hour commute? More often than not, he stays in a hotel within walking distance from his office a couple of nights a week and works on his research from home the other days. This way he can still teach his classes in in person and conduct his research using the modern wonders of internet communications. Now he gets to enjoy the best of two worlds!   However, he is always looking for a better solution. If anyone has a helicopter and they would like to give Nasr a ride, there is a helicopter landing port on the top of the medical building at UCLA. Oh, I forgot to mention, that at age 67, Nasr had a brand new experience. He ate Cracker Jacks for the first time in his life and discovered they were quite tasty. Unfortunately, there was no prize in the box. Let’s hope he didn’t eat it.

Virginia’s new beginning and ending was her retirement. Why do we have to wait so long to retire? This is a well-kept secret that retirees try to keep from their working friends. I am enjoying doing everything and nothing. My problem is that I do not accomplish one quarter of what I did when I worked. I get up early and am busy all day, but very little of what I planned to do gets done—and I don’t even watch TV. I do miss the children. I do miss my friends. I do NOT miss the politics and pressure. My first day of retirement was in Hawaii. Sun, fun and relaxation in a 5-Star resort—not a bad beginning of retirement. A few weeks later, we were in Auckland, New Zealand. If you have not visited New Zealand, you must put this on your bucket list. We were there during their winter, yet is was green and luscious, but a bit wet. Once outside the city, every turn you make gives you an even more spectacular view of mountains, verdant hills and unusual outcroppings popping up from the ground like giant earth-green pimples. You must visit the glow worm caves where there is no light, but the light from the glow worms sparkling like a million stars in the pitch black cave. A couple of months later, we visited Aachen, Germany. I am so glad Nasr is working and has these conferences to attend. He keeps repeating, “I don’t want to retire, I don’t want to retire!” That is fine with me. I get to travel and if I had to live with someone who is unhappily retired, that would send me scurrying back to work—or at least out the door. Aachen is an ancient city with lots of history and a cold, stone, throne. Charlemagne sat on this throne in Aachen. I think we Hollywood-ize the life of kings and queens, because his throne would have been so uncomfortable and cold in the winter. Nasr was working, but we had a chance to visit the point where the three countries of Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands share the same border. You can visit three countries in three seconds. That was on Nasr’s bucket list—now he can check it off. We also had a spectacular, gourmet meal in a huge cave in The Netherlands. (This is the year of the cave—does that have any significance?) I am writing now. I mean writing more than just my yearly letter. I have gone back to writing my children’s books and getting them critiqued. Also, I created a webpage. Yes—I DID IT! For many of you, that is not a huge accomplishment, but for old, computer-challenged, people, it is a big deal. The website is my forum for my blog, Life’s Chapter. Please visit my site at lifeschapter.com/ Blog is short for weblog on a website. I thought once I retired I was going to sit on my laurels and reminiscence about what I know, not learn so many new things. Who would have thought?

Amira, Matt, Siena and Jada are booked! Their calendar is filled with fun events for the girls and their community. I believe they had 6 Halloween parties to attend, special school events and playdates. Amira and Matt go along for the ride—as most parents of 4 and 6 year olds do. Time for tea! The girls and I have begun a new tradition. When I visit, we must have our tea party. Of course, you must dress up for the party and you absolutely MUST wear your best hat. I gave the girls a set of ladybug—real size—tea cups. At this point their tea tastes more like chocolate milk, but at some point we may introduce a little tea into it. No tea party is complete without homemade cupcakes and cupcake shaped sandwiches. We have to read our favorite books and dance to the latest and loudest music. Oh, don’t forget, our little pinky must be held up and away from the cup. Jada has this mastered. Siena has decided she is going to work for Gidu. She has plans to be an engineer in his company. Gidu already has created her job description. She will write proposals, interface with clients and do some troubleshooting. I think she has to learn a lot of vocabulary just so she can read her job description. I was bowled over when Amira told me she went bowling this year. Her lanes of choice were the ones in the White House! Yes, you know, where the President lives. The area is called the Harry S. Truman Bowling Alley. The décor is 60’s orange. There are photos of past and current presidents bowling. Amira said she didn’t bowl all that well. According to her one of the lanes is kind of wobbly. I haven’t figured out if that is her excuse or not. All this is through work. Does anyone else want Amira’s job?

Adam, Oanh and Olivia are welcoming a new member to their family this year. I want to introduce I am a little late with my letter because I wanted to include her in the letter. Adam and Olivia spend a lot of time together. He loves being a dad. There are times when his Marine manners (not public manners) come to the forefront. Olivia is trying to mimic her dad’s burps by growling. The other children in the park, get a little concerned. She also knows her dad is a softie and that Mommy tries very hard to feed her healthy foods and snacks. The whole family will be sitting in the living room and Olivia will get up, take her dad by the hand and lead him into the kitchen. She points to the cupboard that has the chocolate. She knows she can’t ask in front of mom, so she sneaks dad into the kitchen and it works! She also sits on Gidu’s lap and whispers sweet nothings in his ear—chocolate, Gidu, chocolate. They say she inherited her love of chocolate from Teta. What can I say, if it is in the genes, there’s not much I can do. When I am lucky enough to get to LA and can pick Olivia up from school, we have Cupcake Dates. There is a lovely bakery not far from her school and we pick out the prettiest and chocolatiest cupcakes and savor them while we talk about her day and her friends. (I think my granddaughters have a thing for cupcakes. Or is it me?) As Gidu was carrying Olivia, she stroked his mustache and said, “I like your mustache, Gidu.” That made his day. According to Gidu, only two girls have said they liked his mustache—and they said it 40 years apart. (Do you think he was referring to me?)

Jasmine has embarked on a new beginning. She completed her Master’s in Public Health from George Washington University in August. Then she flew as fast as she could to “Cali” as she refers to it. A graduate deserves a graduation gift. Jasmine’s gift was a new BMW 328i with a Pearl finish. It is so perrrrtttyy. Before the drought the BMW dealer offered free car washes every week. She was very accustomed to having a beautiful clean car, but when that program ended, she had to find another alternative. She told her dad that she found a good deal. A car wash for only $60! Once Nasr recovered from the sticker shock, it took a while, he convinced Jasmine that she could wash her own car for NOTHING—as we pay for the water and the soap. So, now we have car washing days. We line up the three cars, then all three are vacuumed, washed and polished. The best part is now Jasmine has $60 more dollars in her pocket, and Nasr has a smile on his face. Next step is to find a job. It is almost a Catch 22. You need experience for a job, but if companies don’t hire people without experience, how do you get a job? She spends long hours filling out applications, resumes, and cover letters. But the early morning—correction—the morning is for her. She gets in her beautiful automobile, grabs a cup of her favorite Starbucks coffee and drives along the coast for hours enjoying the sun, the waves and the air flowing through her hair as she contemplates her next moves. California is the place she wants to be.

So much has happened and we are happy with our new beginnings and look fondly upon all that ended. We wish the New Year will be filled with new beginnings and new experiences for our family and friends. But most importantly, may your year be filled with happiness and good health!