Greetings:

The Ghoniems have been on the go this year.

December 2016

Nasr couldn't afford a honeymoon in 1976 so this year, our 40th Anniversary, we spent almost the entire year enjoying a honeymoon punctu1ted with short breaks in Carlsbad taking long walks on the beach, contemplating the red and gold sunsets and frolicking in the pool. We welcomed the New Year on the Big Island of Hawaii. We flew thousands of feet over the island in a helicopter getting a bird's eye view of the red and black roiling earth of the Kilauea volcano, majestic waterfalls, 2000 foot cliffs, and the lush verdant canyons of Hilo. But that wasn't the height of our trip. Our most astonishing adventure was the tour to the top of Mauna Kea, 13, 796 feet above sea level. Yes, the frigid, biting, air, as thin as a shadow of hair, doled out a hefty dose of altitude sickness, but it was more than worth the headache. Stargazing is an incredible experience as the number of stars up there is comparable to the number of drops in the sea. A month or so later, Nasr had a conference at the Schontal Abbey in southwestern Germany. Imagine if you will, sleeping in a monastery that was built in 1153. The massive, towering, stone hallways dwarf even the tallest and you feel a spirituality there that is reminiscent of the many monks who walked those hallowed halls. While Nasr worked, I wandered the endless bike path that goes from city to city. One day the trees sprouted the new green leaves of spring and the next they were blanketed in snow. The snow didn't last more than a few hours, but for a little while this Californian got a chance to amble in a winter-wonderland. Nasr is a Ovil War buff, so considering we were on the East Coast, (an explanation will come later) we traveled to Charleston, South Carolina and Savanah, Georgia. Charleston, to both its detriment and its benefit, has changed very little since the Civil War. As there was no highway leading to it, it was isolated in time and space. So, when you visit, you will feel you time traveled back to the Civil War era. We were told that Charleston was once considered the Sodom and Gomorrah of the United States because the citizens of that city frequented theatres like those in Europe. Savanah has spectacular squares each heavily shaded and sporting a monument to a Southern hero all throughout the city. And for my war buff, this was the city where the first bullet of the Civil War was shot and now you know why we went there. After two weeks of staying in Carlsbad, we were on the road again. Poor Nasr had another conference. This one was held in Dijon, France. Yes, think mustard and yes I did bring home a few of their special recipes. We stayed at The Grand Hotel La Cloche which could easily pass for a palace. Dijon is a quaint little town that also has not changed much over the centuries. If you enjoy history, you will be mesmerized by the tea house from the 11th century-yes, it is the same building, touch the owl on Dijon's Notre Dame and your wish will come true-as long as you touch it with your left hand, and visit a Chateau that is also a winery. I learned that the area of Dijon is noted for the best wines. As Nasr was busy working, I was free to wander and walk the old streets and shop. Paris was a mere weekend, but we managed to dine in one of its most famous restaurants, walk the Champs Elysees, and savor a warm, chocolate crepe or two. YUM! Then we were on the move again. That Sunday, we breakfasted in Paris, lunched in Munich, Germany and had tapas in the evening in Madrid, Spain. We saw the beautiful architecture in Madrid, and learned that tapas are small plates of food, but what surprised us was the Egyptian Temple in the middle of Madrid. Do you know what Disney's magic castle is modeled after? The castle in Segovia, Spain. The original castle has the round turrets and pointed caps for the roof, just like Disney! Also, this archaic city has a towering, Roman aqueduct that is still in use. It spans almost 2500 feet, has more than 170 arches, and the highest arch is 87 feet high. Since we were in the "neighborhood", we had to see the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. Little did we know you need to buy tickets months in advance. The only reason for this leg of our trip was to see the Moorish castle. Remember this is our honeymoon year and Nasr didn't want to disappoint me. So, at 5:30 am you found us sitting, back to back, on the hard, cold, and gritty, concrete sidewalk--in the dark, hoping and praying that we would get tickets. We did get those golden tickets, but we also had to go out and buy some Ben Gay for our aching joints and muscles. The main part of the castle is called Nasr's Castle. If you don't think that didn't go to his head, think again. The Arabic designs that cover the walls and ceilings are unique and breathtaking. Nasr found his name everywhere-I mean on every single wall. No Nasr, this is not your castle. I had to pull him kicking and screaming to the airport because he wanted to stay in his castle. Our yearlong honeymoon was phenomenal. We are staying home through the

holidays, but we will be on the road again in January. We are heading to Puerta Vallarta, Mexico.

Nasr found two hobbies this year. He decided he enjoyed refurbishing items, so he picked up the cookie pan that we have had since our wedding and used elbow grease, steel cleaning pads, a hard copper brush and lots of abrasive cleaners to clean it up. After hours of work in the sun, parts of it look great, some parts still need some work. I think he finally realized, it would be cheaper just to buy a new one-I think he spent more money on the cleaning materials than the cost of a new pan. He will most likely stay with his second hobby. He started golf lessons along with myself and some dear friends. Don't let anyone tell you that golf is easy. Your core muscles are in play every time you swing-and yes, we will let you know next year how this hobby turned out.

Virginia is so happy that she retired for all the reasons listed above. I have been doing a little writing and I now have two little articles published in Woman's World Magazine. Let's see what happens next year.



Amira, Matthew, Siena and Jada. Even though they are all the way across the country, we've been able to get together several times and will even for Christmas this year. The girls could tell their friends that they swam in two oceans this year. They celebrated the fourth of July in California and watched a kaleidoscopic firework show over the golf course from our back yard. Only a few weeks later, they traveled to Corolla, North Carolina to enjoy a week on the Outer Banks. Of course, we joined them. Amira knows how to pick vacation locales. We stayed in a huge Victorian home. The beach was five minutes away and the water was warm and welcoming. Nasr loves to eat something sweet with his coffee. Amira brought a box of Windmill cookies and she thought they would last the week. Nope. Once Nasr found them (I may have helped a little) they were gone in a day. Amira was a little disappointed that she didn't get any of the cookies. I felt bad so I sent three boxes to her in the mail. Jada told her mom when she looked in the box that the reason I sent them was because Gidu ate all the cookies. You cannot have a vacation without a little adventure but ours wasn't so little. We battened down the hatches and waited out Hurricane Hermine. Amira and Matthew grabbed the kids and hightailed it home before landfall. The wind slammed against walls and windows, like a giant wielding a huge sledge hammer. We were sure the windows would shatter. The house groaned and shingles went flying off the roof. We hunkered down on the narrow strip of land until it passed. Then it was onto Charleston-I told you I would explain. Siena, Jada and I worked on a book while we were in the Outer Banks. After watching all the antics of Gidu, we are going to write a book entitled. "What Are We Going To Do With Gidu?" Oh, by the way, Amira already sent us a picture of a cruise in the Norwegian Fiords. Will that be next year's vacation?

Adam, Oanh, Olivia and introducing Gemma Lang Ghoniem! She waited to be born until after I finished last year's letter. She was born on 12/16/15-so she has her first birthday coming up. When I get the chance to babysit for Gemma I am in 7th heaven. Gemma is supposed to sleep in her bed, Mom and Dad are very good at that, but Teta-not so much. I gave her the bottle, put her on my shoulder to burp her and she fell asleep. Now, her parents are smart and they have a reclining chair in the baby's room. Sitting in that chair is so comfortable and it felt so good holding the baby, but I wanted to do what her parents asked. So, as I started to get up and put her in the crib, she woke up. She cried real tears! There was no way I could put her down now, that would be too cruel! There was nothing else I could do but let her comfortably settle down on my chest. It is a process for Gemma to wake up. First, she pushes her bottom up and then tucks her knees under her. Her head was firmly planted on my chest. I sensed her contemplating and trying to figure out a way to pick up such a heavy head-especially when it feels so good to be held. It took a good ten tries before she pulled it up and then slowly opened her unfocused eyes. I think I just witnessed how all of us wake up. Olivia loves being a big sister. She loves her sister and can give her bear hugs and long, suffocating kisses. Sometimes her enthusiasm is a little too much for Gemma and she needs to be saved from all that love. Olivia might be the actress of the family and/or the most adventurous. She tells her dad, "Let's be dramatic!" and "Let's do something crazy!" It makes dad a little worried. She is a very witty child. Her mother told her that when someone offers you food, you cannot say you do not like it. You MUST taste it before you say, no thank you. One day, Olivia made a concoction that she loves. She mushed Baby Bell cheese, Cheerios and blueberry yogurt into a ball. She gave it to her mother who said, "No, thank you." Olivia told her mother that "You can't say no thank you until you try it." It's tough when the tables

are turned on you.

Jasmine is working at Red Cross. Jasmine also has had a year of travels. Do you think it might be contagious? Her first was a road trip to Arizona and Utah. This may be hard for you to believe, it took me a while to wrap my head around it, but Jasmine likes camping. I mean real camping in the wilderness on the cold, hard, ground in the forest camping--not in a campground-camping. I thought the most camping she would ever do was camp in the Hilton. See your children can always surprise you-even at 30. She camped in Sedona, Bryce Canyon and Zion Canyon. She is also turning into a bit of a photographer. She takes beautiful pictures of spectacular and breathtaking nature. She also learned that cameras lose their charge in cold weather-and it was cold camping in the mountains. She celebrated her birthday in New Orleans, along with seven of her friends from school. She went to Detroit-two times-to visit friends. Her last adventure wasa road trip uptheentire West Coast-think San Francisco, Portland,Seattle and then went international as they drove into Vancouver, Canada-and all points in between. At least weknow Nasr'scar passed security, because it was searched before it could get into Canada. I don't want to know the details, and I don't need to know since she got home safely. Thank goodness for the locator device on her phone so I could see where she was at all times. I don't know what I could have done, but I felt she was

safer as long as I could "see" her.

2017 is on the horizon and there's a new sheriff in town and we pray that he will keep us safe. I want to wish everyone a prosperous, happy and particularly healthy New Year!