Greetings:

This year we've been looking up-really looking up!

December 2017

Nasr, months away from completing another decade, has finally found a hobby. Actually, I am grateful that it took him this long to pick this particular hobby. He is learning to play the Egyptian drum called the Darbuka or as the Egyptians call it, a Tubla. He is taking on-line lessons. When someone starts playing a new instrument, it often is off tune, but a drum is a constant bum, bum, bum-bum-bum, bum, bum. He looks as if he is in a trance, just happily beating that drum. He beats it in the family room, he beats it in the living room, he beats it in the garage and he beats it in the backyard.

After a little while, I want to beat it out of the house into a padded room.

Virginia-still 21-in her addled brain-is loving retirement. I have the opportunity to be creative and I thoroughly enjoy it. Now, I get to live my life one chapter at a time, and quite often without any continuity from the previous chapter.

My blog, [www.lifeschapter.com](http://www.lifeschapter.com/) compiles all my individual chapters. Being who I am, my chapters usually have a bit of humor in them. They also go into more details about our travels and mishaps. Some of our experiences are doozies!

We have become vagabonds. We travel from place to place to place looking for adventure. We spent New Year's in Puerta Vallarta. We enjoyed both the winter and spring in Munich (spring was much warmer), especially for climbing to mountain castles, and visited dear friends in Salzburg and Vienna.

What does a rainforest, king crabs and reindeer meat have in common? Alaska. Yes, we traveled the inner passage up to Seward. I had no idea Alaska had a rainforest, they get almost 150 inches of rain a year! The King Crabs were colossal and had a titanic taste. YUM! I must thank those fisherman on the Deadliest Catch-it is worth all their work. It took me a while to taste reindeer meat because I was afraid I was eating Rudolph, but I found reindeer meat is worthy of a second helping. Alaskan huskies-you know the snow sled dogs-are noisy and they are very thin. Movies show the cute, fluffy Siberian Huskies, but they are too slow and lazy for a real dog sled. Yup, we were pulled by 12 **Alaskan Huskies** through the wilderness. The only time they stop barking is when they are running. The Hubbard Glacier is massive, and we were within ¼ mile from it. The boat crew picked pieces of glacier ice from the water and I held it. It is so clear and clean you want to drink it right there. But don't, because your tongue would be permanently stuck to the ice. It is soooo cold. Trekking inland is another adventure. Inside Denali National Park we were within a hundred yards of a grizzly bear. For some reason when the bear started coming closer, the bus moved. I wonder why?

Mount Denali, (formerly Mt. McKinley) the tallest mountain in the United States, stood at all its glory in the bright sunlight. It is very rare to see the entire mountain at once and we gazed in awe of it.

I am so glad Nasr is still working because I get to travel with him to conferences, etc. I must admit I was a little leery about going to China because I had no real idea of what to expect. I found friendly, kind people who love to laugh. The sights in Beijing were awesome, but my favorite was our visit to the Terra Cotta Warriors in Xi 'an (pronounced She-an). These ancient relics were discovered in 1974 by a young farmer. As part of our tour, we had the opportunity to meet this farmer and shake his hand. The tour guide said he was very old, but Nasr and I think he is younger than us!

As long as Nasr was conferencing in Japan, we hightailed it down to Tokyo and took a tour to Mount Fuji-the tallest mountain in Japan. We ascended that one to the seventh station (via bus)-I wonder if we could ever get to the 10th station. Nope, we're too old.

Amira, Matthew, Siena and Jada, lead very busy lives. Their neighborhood is filled with young families, so they have countless number of opportunities for progressive dinners, movie nights, picnics, soccer, dance, gymnastics, and lots and lots of play dates for the girls. The girls have conquered skating, bike riding, swimming and diving. Each time I visit, Siena and Jada must have Tea with Teta. They are becoming much more sophisticated in their tastes. This year, we

made cheese and cucumber tea sandwiches. We are still working on the tea aspect of a tea party. "Tea" looks more like juice and chocolate milk, but the etiquette of tea time remains the same. Oh, they had to remind me to put my little pinky up-they were a little disappointed in my behavior. The whole family went to Nashville to see the total eclipse of the sun. The day was beautiful and sunny and then eerie when the sun was covered. I must admit I am jealous because

I have never seen a total eclipse of the sun. I have to wait until April 2024! Don't ask how old I will be, I can't count that high.

Adam, Oanh, Olivia and Gemma. The girls keep Oanh very busy! Olivia loves to ask why questions. Whenever anyone tells her something, she asks why. One day, she turned to her dad and asked, "Why do I ask why?" Does anyone have a good answer for that? Olivia, like her Teta, loves California Pizza Kitchen bread, but Olivia's true love is butter. She will only eat the inside squishy part ofthe bread. Once she has the bread in her hand, she digs it, yes digs it into the butter. If she can't get enough, she sticks her fingers into the butter to get more. Then she rubs the butter on her teeth as if she is brushing them with butter. Olivia is learning Spanish in school, mom speaks Vietnamese to her and Gidu speaks Arabic to her. They say the more languages you know, the better you do in school. Gemma is a character. She wears her hair on top of her head like Cindy Lou Who, but Gemma is cuter. She looks just like Adam did when he was her age, her body build and face. Speaking of her face, she makes the best sad faces in the universe. No one can resist her looks of disappointment or her shaky lower lip-except Mom. Mom has to warn me not to save Gemma. She is a little pistol, but she is so cute when you tell her no. Gemma loves to climb. She has no fear. She can easily climb out of car seats, up onto the table, out of the crib, and anywhere you don't want her to climb. Oanh thinks she is going to be a rock climber. I told her that most likely Gemma will climb Mr. Everest. Gemma is an eater. She can pack away 4 pieces of kid's pizza, a bowl of pasta, and then use the tomato sauce as make-up on her face. Adam has taken up the same hobby as his dad. They both are banging on the drums. They want to create their own band. Oh, and he plans on teaching Olivia how to play. What should they call themselves? And where can I hide?

Jasmine loves San Diego. I think she found her nirvana here-except when her father wakes her up with a drum roll on his Darbuka. He says he must practice his fingering and waking her up gives him a chance to practice. Jazz has turned into an avid hiker. She will go for all day hikes and then come home and tell me, mom you cannot do that. It nearly killed me. Good to know my daughter doesn't want me to die on the hiking trails. The one trail that I wish she would not take is the one to Potato Chip Rock. Yes, it is a very thin rock overhanging a very deep canyon. I can't tell if she is brave or foolhardy, but she sits right on the edge of that rock. I am so glad when she gets home. Jazz is now Professor Ghoniem at National University. She has an adjunct professor position and loves teaching. She and her dad talk about their struggles with the deadbeat students and brainstorm solutions. Amira was here in September and she wanted to take Jasmine to Orange Theory with her. In my mind, I thought Orange Theory must have something to do with specialty orange drinks. I found out, it is a gym. Once Amira had Jazz signed up, they both worked on me to go. I had a thousand reasons not to go, but the biggest was that this gym is filled with YOUNG BEAUTIFUL people and I would stick out like a sore thumb. They begged me. I can't turn down an opportunity to hang with my grown children. Orange Theory is circuit training on treadmills, rowing machines and weights. I survived, barely. Then Jazz said she wanted to sign up. Great. I encouraged her to sign up. "No mom, I need you to go with me to encourage me." I let her know I can encourage her from the couch, the kitchen table or wherever. No such luck. I ended up signing up with her. She is getter stronger every day. Thank goodness, the trainers there are kind to old people. I told Jazz, she has to get the song, "I survived" and play it every time we finish a workout.

We have survived another year! We have looked high to the sky and ogled over great mountains. As William

Shakespeare said, "Our peace will stand as firm as rocky mountains." I pray that our peace and peace of mind will stand as firm as the mountains we've seen. we wish all our friends and family a peaceful, happy, healthy, and humorous New Year!