December 2019

Warm Winter Greetings!

2019 was jam-packed with fun, family and a bit of globetrotting—ok, I guess we did a lot of horsing around.

Nasr has a new look--he shaved his moustache after sporting one for over 40 years, and Virginia, still working on the novel, travelled more this year than almost any other year. To capture our memories, Nasr was armed with his Nikon 850--say OOOH—it’s a special camera. Note: If you ever travel with a photographer you either wait for them for get the “perfect” shot, or you sigh LOUDLY, and move ahead with the group. I did a little of both. All kidding aside, he is getting pretty good at taking photos and we have some interesting shots to prove it. We travelled to the top of the mountains in Bryce Canyon, marveling at the impossibly shaped stone hoodoos (towers of rocks) that are constantly being carved by the wind, rain and snow. We traversed the world and snorkeled under the turquoise sea, swimming and cavorting with the vibrant, multi-colored tropical fish of Australia and Tahiti. This is what we did in-between and after. Colossal, red, granite-faced mountains towered over us like giant stone monsters, hovering silently as we wound through the narrow Zion Canyon. In Melbourne, Australia we stood close enough to Fairy Penquins that we could have reached out and stroked their shiny backs. These six-inch, blue penquins leave their nests at dawn, head straight to the ocean, spend the day fishing, and exactly at sunset, they all come waddling back to their shelters squawking a cacophony of peeps, donkey calls and moans. Of course, we saw kangaroos, but a lovely little Koala mama shyly turned to me and showed me her baby. It was a such a kind, motherly gesture, I wanted to cry Hamilton Island, Australia is the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef. We braved the cold, winter seas—72 degrees F, donned our wetsuits and jumped—I don’t dive--into the open sea. A storm had badly damaged the reef a couple of years ago, so it has lost much of its beauty and luster. Even though many fish have left the reef, it’s still a spectacular site to see. If you are looking for amazing, sleeping in the over-water bungalows in the warm South Pacific Ocean, is about as good as it gets. Imagine stepping off your back porch into bath-temperature water and entering a peaceful, calm world filled with hundreds of tiny, vividly colored fish. We donned a wet suit once more, but this time we had hand-held scooters that propelled us through the water. Our little scooters pulled us past huge schools of multi-colored fish, swimming, darting, and hiding in the indescribably beautiful, purple, blue and white corral. We discovered Stingrays are just like dogs—they follow you all around. The ones, used to humans, bumped up against us to get our attention. The white underbelly is so smooth and soft, and the top is as scratchy as a cow’s tongue. Nope---we’re not done yet. Watching the blue, orange and purple sunset over the Mediterranean Sea in Alexandria, Egypt puts life in perspective. How many people, and for how many thousands of years have humans watched the sun set over Egypt? It certainly is a sight to see. Nasr’s nephew, Mohamed married a lovely girl, Rodaina and we were so honored to be invited to the wedding. Nasr tried to be a photographer but learned that being a wedding photographer is much harder than one would think. There is too much pressure to get it right, so Nasr has decided that wedding photography is one task he will never undertake. After the wedding, we headed straight to the North Coast of Egypt and stayed in a beautiful resort with Nasr’s sister and family. The Mediterranean water was beautiful and warm. But the fish there were a little different than the ones in Tahiti. These little silver fish loved to nip at people’s skin. Since I wore sunscreen, they didn’t like my taste, so I was relatively safe. Others who “didn’t need” sunscreen were on the lunch menu! Every few seconds you would hear someone shout or scream in surprise and maybe a little pain as the fish took their tiny bites. We spent hours in the water and when we weren’t in the water, we were at the cafes eating wonderful Egyptian rice pudding. I don’t care what they say about all the other treasurers of Egypt, for me their rice pudding is their best treasure. Luckily, we had a chance to spend time in Alexandria with some spectacular friends and family. Wait-there’s more—we’re going to Egypt and Jordan on Dec. 22—but you’ll have to wait to hear about that next year!

Amira, Matthew, Siena (10), Jada (8-by the time you read this) traveled along the U.S. Southern Eastern Seaboard this year frolicking on an island and discovering new sea creatures. Siena celebrated her first double digit birthday in August with a trip to Sea World. Siena’s giggles and merriment caught by the lazy breeze wafted over the park as the crazy antics of the sea lions entertained us all. Siena’s next rite of passage was to ride the big girl rollercoaster, The Journey to Atlantis. She loved it! Wanted to do it again! However, I now know when and why kids stop listening to their parents. Before the ride started, Amira convinced Jada that she was ready at 8 years old for a big rollercoaster and it would be FUN! Well, the look on Jada’s face when she got off was not the look of a child that just had fun. She looked as if she had been tortured. I would have had the same look if I went on it, too. Her mom kept telling her—to prevent hysterical crying—that it was so much fun. If I was Jada, I would never believe my mom again. (That was the same trick my family played on me. No, I never go on rollercoasters!) Amira has always loved Egyptian food but hasn’t made a lot of it. This year, she put together a complete meal of Egyptian foods, including stuffed grape leaves for a large group of friends. She followed the same recipes that my friends gave to me over 40 years ago. The meal was a success, as I knew it would be. Siena has discovered riddles and she loves to tell them to Gidu—hoping she will stump him. Riddle me this: What can't a person hold for long that is lighter than a feather? Another is:  You are in a dungeon with a bucket of water and a hamburger. You want to get out. There are 2 doors. Behind one door is a lagoon full of sharks. Behind the other door is a blazing fire. How do you escape? Don’t worry, I’ll give you the answers, but take your time to figure it out. Jada takes after her mom and is a soccer star! Of course, it helps that Mom is the team coach. Siena loves tumbling and wherever you find her she is doing a cartwheel or a round off. She takes after Teta-who at one time did love tumbling and wasn’t bad at it. But now, I spend a lot of time just tumbling over, and I’m not trying anything more complicated than putting one foot in front of the other.

Oanh, Olivia (7 in February), Gemma (4 by the time you read this) and Adam. Nasr and I took the girls to Zion Canyon at the end of May. I don’t know if Olivia and Gemma enjoyed the view as much as their mother and us, but they did love having a snowball fight in Bryce Canyon. Those kids have a good aim—and they spent a lot of time aiming at me. We rented a house that slept 13! The girls loved the house because they slept in double-size bunk beds! Olivia kept telling us that she wanted to go to the holiday. We explained to her, as we checked out the sights, that seeing the canyons was our holiday. Oh no. The holiday was the house with the bunk beds! I wish I had a quarter of the energy of these two girls, I would solve all the world problems in one day. Gemma has her own interpretation of how to say some words “Otay” is Okay and when she sees something that is cute, she says, “It’s ado-bul.” Translation: adorable. Both girls have extensive vocabulary, it just takes a little sleuthing to figure out what they are saying sometimes. Gemma used to be shy when she was around people, but not so much anymore. While she peeks through her bangs that hang in her face, she strikes a coquettish pose and then proceeds to tell delivery men and friends her life story. Last weekend Olivia told Gidu that she was planning on having ten hundred kids. Yes, that is 1000 children. Then she proceeded to tell him that she and her kids will come and live at our house so Gidu can still take care of her and her kids. The kicker was that she was going to start having all these kids at 18. That was when we put the brakes on that idea. We would take care of her 1000 children, but she had to get a college degree first—that was NON-NEGOTIABLE. Anyone have any space for a “few hundred” extra kids?

Jasmine has informed me that I have 4 grandchildren and 2 grand-dogs! I spend more time taking care of them than I do of all my grandchildren combined. Jasmine is interning so I “babysit” her two gorgeous huskies, Dakota and Juneau during the day. We are constantly tripping over toys! Oh no, they are not the grandchildren’s toys. They are dog toys. You can convince children to pick up their toys after a little cajoling, but dogs will NEVER pick up their toys! Remember, dog toys are usually covered in disgusting slobber! To be fair to Adam’s kids, these dogs have even more energy than his girls. We informed Jasmine that when she starts working full time, she is finding a dog sitter for them. Jasmine will finish her SECOND Masters in June. This one is in education. She still teaches Public Health Administration at National University. She is very busy. She is teaching at National, interning at a local high school and taking on-line courses from University of Southern California (USC). She occasionally comes out of her room to say hello, but then heads back inside to study some more. But now, we have a problem. We have the two major rival universities in Los Angeles living in one household. UCLA AND USC. Pray we will survive it.

My Christmas wish this year is that we all thrive, survive the turmoil and live in peace, happiness and in good health.

Nasr and Virginia

1. Your breath
2. Throw the hamburger into the lagoon to distract the sharks, fill your bucket with water, and use that to put out the fire.