Salutations and Good Tidings, December 2022

2022 was the year of the Tiger. Tigers are a little rebellious, unpredictable, and adventurous. I guess this year the Tiger helped us rebel against Covid, create an unpredictable election, and gave us plenty of adventures.

Nasr enjoyed a lot of admiration from his students and colleagues this year. The last of his students graduated in May. There was a party with 43 attendees, for his 42nd Ph. D student after teaching for 45 years. But he wasn’t done celebrating because a symposium was held in his honor at the conference on Multiscale Modeling of Materials (try to say that 5 times fast) in Baltimore. Over the past 45 years he has taught some very intelligent people working in high places, and they showed up to pay tribute to Nasr. The symposium was supposed to have taken place in 2020 when he “officially retired”, but Covid had other plans. As soon as the last student wore his cap and gown, Nasr stopped spending ALL DAY in his office. Nasr took on a second career—gardener/construction worker. The summer was super-hot, but he insisted on wearing his long sleeve coveralls made of dark blue, heavy denim to keep his clothes clean. Nasr binged on You Tube to learn how to do all the projects he wanted to do. He bought a spray paint machine and learned how to spray paint. He now can lay tile on floors and walls, and he does all sorts of landscaping. Nasr has been living in YouTube nirvana. This fall he hired a contractor to paint the inside of the house. ARRRRGGGGGHHHHHH. My suggestion is not to do the whole house at once—especially just a few weeks before Thanksgiving. He also had new ceiling lights installed in most rooms. These are not ordinary lights—you need a Ph.D. to set them up and use them. Using the app, you change the brightness, and the color of each lamp. These devices even flash dance to music, no, I am not kidding. Don’t worry, by the New Year he will be back sitting at his desk for hours—the siren song from the computer has started calling him already.

Virginia attended her 50th High School Reunion. Dang it! How did 50 years go by so fast. Things are constantly changing but boy, has De Pere, Wisconsin, changed. It now has a cultural center that plans to rival the best arts centers in the states. De Pere? Yup! They cleaned the Fox River from the pollution of the 70’s, so for the first time, I cruised the Fox, and surprisingly it flows north just like the Nile. There are many MANSIONS—not big houses, but honest goodness mansions, on the banks. Our high school is now an intermediate school that houses 4th and 5th graders. The principal is very young, (maybe 5!!) but he did a great job of showing us the changes in the building. But the one thing that hasn’t changed is how wonderful us “kids” (pushing 70) have remained. People in Wisconsin are fun, but I think my class of 1972 has the most warm-hearted people in the world. I’m still writing—cross your fingers—I don’t want to jinx it. Also, I have gone back to playing the piano. I am learning to play like the pianists in lounges. I use chords for the left hand and play a simple melody with the right hand. In the last two months, I’ve tickled the ivories more than I have in the last 50 years. I don’t keep Nasr awake at night because his ear buds block out any outside noise. At least that is what he wants me to believe, otherwise it’s his reason for ignoring me. What do you think? Guess who oversaw Grandma Camp this summer. We had all four granddaughters for a month. It was wonderful and Nasr and I slept well all month. I am blessed with well behaved grandkids that have a lot of energy. Surprisingly the month flew by. We went to the beach, had a lot of fun in the pool, ate gelato, hiked, ate gelato, swam in the ocean, ate gelato, surfed, ate gelato, did goat yoga, ate gelato and they even did daily, summer homework.

Amira, Matthew, Siena, and Jada bought a new house—then they tore it down and are building a new one in its place—but this one will be much bigger and prettier. That is what they do on the “Other Coast.” Amira planned a wonderful family trip to Boston and then onto Maine for ALL of us. We all ate so much lobster that we will have no problem waiting until next summer to indulge again. But we did get a chance to hold a lobster on our lobster cruise. Siena and Jada were not born under the zodiac water signs, but they should have been. While visiting us, Jada got up in the morning, did her homework and stayed almost all day in the pool. Siena took surfing lessons and was in the pool almost much as Jada. Siena, as of August, is a teenager. Does that tell you anything? Nasr tutors her in math, just like he tutored so many kids in the neighborhood. But instead of using the white board and sitting in the nook, he was teaching via zoom. A few weeks ago, Siena, with her school chorus, sang with the Marine band in the famous Wolf Trap Amphitheatre outside of Washington D.C. Jada spends a lot of time in another world—the virtual world. She puts on a special head piece that covers her eyes. Then you will find her in the middle of the family room, jumping, and grabbing for things that are *not* there in *our* world. It’s very weird to watch. She is also a great athlete. Her traveling soccer team won their last tournament—I guess the swimming was good for her stamina. She is also taking trombone lessons with the school band. Jada is the slime queen. I think she could be in the Guinness Book of World Records for the amount of homemade slime she has created. Both girls are winners. At their neighborhood Halloween festival, they and their two friends won 2nd Place in the Chili Cook Off Competition. They were the only kids who participated, and all entries were anonymous. Siena said they used a traditional recipe, but they were fighting all the while they were cooking. I told her maybe the fight energy made the chili taste better.

Oanh, Olivia, Gemma, were busy this year. During Grandma Camp they really had fun playing with their cousins. Olivia and Jada are just a year apart so that was easy, but Siena and Gemma are six and a half years apart. Gemma thinks that is the best—if she had her druthers she would be glued to Siena. You all have to praise Siena because she pretty willingly spent time with Gemma, and deep down I know she had fun. Olivia loves to create whatever she can using arts and crafts. She knows how to make homemade stickers, beaded lizards, and origami everything. Gemma can spend her day painting, creating sculptures with clay and dancing. She is usually dancing to whatever is on the tv. She doesn’t watch, she wants us to watch her dance. When we are out walking, she behaves like she is in the movie, *Singing in the Rain*, hopping on the curbs, twirling on benches and jumping into our arms. Olivia, like her dad loves to talk, but she takes it to a different level—our ears are ringing by the time she goes to bed. These two children are very wise. One day Nasr bought some noise makers for Gemma. Olivia came up to me and said, “Teta, Gidu just sent you on a trip to headache land with that toy.” And she did! Both girls are concerned about my health. Gemma told me, “Teta you are a little rusty like a rusty car, but you will live a long time. Right?” Then she added, “You have a lot of wrinkles,” then she squeezes her cheeks under her eyes and adds, “But, you are still pretty.” Olivia saves her wish bones. She is always wishing for her daddy, Adam, to come back. She doesn’t want to chance *not* getting her wish, so she doesn’t break them. I started saving mine, too.

Jasmine (A Tiger) is very busy. She is teaching full time at Audeo 3, a secondary Charter school, and teaches Public Health Administration at National University for abouts 10 months a year. She also reviews applications for UC San Diego admissions. This December she is finishing her last class for her Clear Teaching Credential. She goes on 5-mile-long hikes with her dogs. She wants me to come with her, but she walks too fast going uphill, and the only way I will keep up with her going downhill is to roll down. So, I pass on that activity. Even though she has a lot going on, she was able to go to Maine with us. It is so much fun watching our two girls laugh and tease each other. At the end of the Maine and DC trip we went to Wisconsin for her cousin, Lucy’s, wedding reception. While we were there, my cousin, Mark, took Jasmine, Nasr and I on a field trip through my 10-acre woods. He has this amazing little truck that goes everywhere—even places that are kind of scary-like the edge of the cliffs. But this gave Jazz the bug for the woodlands and outdoors life of Wisconsin. She came back and wanted to buy the land from me, immediately. She thinks she can live there. I laughed. I told her she had to live five months in a Wisconsin winter before I would even consider selling. Would someone please tell my daughter—a confirmed California Valley Girl—that she will freeze in Wisconsin. It is not sunny, warm California!

This has been a good year for the Ghoniems.

Next year will be the year of the pig. We are supposed to leap with faith and not jump to conclusions.

May your 2023 be filled with joy, energy, good health and may we continue our lifelong adventures with the passion of The Tigers.