December 2023

Dear Family and Friends,

I can’t believe how fast the years go by. Time is either important or not important depending on if you are young or old. We look in the mirror and bemoan what time has done to our faces and bodies—we are also amazed at how the grandchildren have grown and flourished. But I guess it is safe to say that no matter how we look at it, we have had a pretty good time this year.

Nasr is reinventing himself. He is still working at UCLA and consulting for three companies, so he is in his office for most of the week. For years I have tried to get Nasr to find a hobby. All work and no play make Nasr a dull boy. He celebrated his 75th birthday and he finally has found a hobby or two or three. He discovered Epoxy—ok, I had no clue what that was either, just know that it is a sticky gluey substance, that can have various colors added to it. It hardens and makes the surface of whatever you are working on very durable. His first project was to create an ocean scene on his garage workbench. Very pretty! Come on guys—I bet you want one like that, too. He discovered that he likes playing with sticky colorful stuff so much that he bought a handheld paint sprayer and painted the garden gate. That was successful so he was on to bigger jobs. He bought a top of the line, industrial paint sprayer. After watching hundreds of YouTube videos, he has decided he can be an expert in everything he decides to do, if YouTube has a video of it. Jasmine wanted to remove the black paint from her kitchen island, so Nasr took over the job. He bought all kinds of timber, an industrial sander, and a painting tent. He is going to use that on Jasmine’s kitchen cabinets. I will let you know how that turns out.

Virginia …Nasr and I went on a trip of a lifetime. Even though we’ve been to Egypt many times, this trip was a first-class adventure. Our dear friends, Semra and Sam traveled with us. We started in Cairo and visited the new Museum of Ancient Civilizations-this is a cliff notes version of the Grand Egyptian Museum. But the one we saw had the mummies of Royal Kings and Queens. The first time I was on the Giza plateau I was 22 years old—you know 5 years ago. At that time, I climbed the inner tunnel and gallery up to the Kings sarcophagus with ease. When we went in 1977, there wasn’t as much interest in the pyramids so there were no crowds. Well, things have changed in 2023. When we decided to climb up the pyramid, we didn’t stop to think that were going to go up 250 feet from where we started. No elevators, only 5 to 7 feet steps. The most difficult part of ascending was walking through the 40–50-foot narrow tunnel that has you walking up bent over from the waist. Yes, that was a workout. Now there are crowds—lots of people going up a tiny tunnel and then into the gallery hall that leads up to the Kings Chamber. There are no windows and no ventilation. Yes, it was HOT. We got our pictures by the sarcophagus, and then we headed down. Ok, it wasn’t 5 years ago, it was closer to 50 years since I climbed up. I got down from the huge gallery. But once we hit the narrow tunnel, my knees and legs gave out. Yup! I scooted down the tunnel on my butt. Nasr, Sam and Semra got down on two feet, not two cheeks. There were a lot of people from all over the world cheering for me…or laughing at me. I will choose cheering. In the future, I will leave the pyramid climbing to the younger people. We flew south to Abu Simbel. These statues are the size of a mountain. Our accommodations in Aswan were the Old Cataract Hotel, where Agatha Christie wrote Death on the Nile. This is a luxurious hotel. Then we boarded the ship for the Cruise north. The food was wonderful. The historical tours we took were beyond imagination and we relaxed completely. Nope, we aren’t done yet with the vacation. We then spent a week in Sharm El Sheik on the Sinai Pennisula in the Four Seasons Hotel. Nasr keeps asking me what I want for Christmas—I think he gave it to me in March.

Amira, Matt, Siena, and Jada built a 5500 square foot house. The builder wanted to make it bigger, but they ran out of land to build on. The three floors have so much light and space. We visited Amira at Thanksgiving. I can’t believe how much decorating they have accomplished in only a few months. On top of working full time, they did a lot of traveling this year. The whole family came to San Diego. That was partly Grandma Camp. Amira had a girls’ weekend in Santa Barbara, and the whole family went to Disney World in November. According to the Koerners, *It’s A Small World* there is not as good as the one in California. Siena is very proud; she is taller than Jasmine and she is still the clone of her mother. Jada is almost as tall as Jazz. I think Jada grew five inches over the summer. There is such a thing as growing pains. Just ask Jada, she was in agony for 6 months. I am sure Matt is related to Tom Sawyer. Nasr must constantly be doing something, or he gets grumpy, so he asked Matt if there was something he could help with around the house. Matt decided he could stain his wood fence. He just had to “glop it on.” So, Matt, aka Tom Sawyer, convinced Nasr that painting the fence would be fun. Nasr wasn’t going to do all the work alone, so he roped me in, telling me it would be fun. Matt got the both of us to paint his 145-foot fence in one day. We wore white painters’ overalls with tight hoods. My white tennis shoes took a beating. I left them there because next time we go we must paint the other side in the neighbor’s yard. Jasmine said we looked like garden gnomes. (If you have read Mark Twain’s book, Tom Sawyer, you will get the reference.

Oanh, Olivia and Gemma. These three work in tandem with Oanh’s sister, Betty. Both Oanh and Betty are nurses and work 12-hour shifts. When Betty is working Oanh takes care of Betty’s babies, and when Oanh is working Betty goes from Korea Town to Canyon Country to pick up Olivia and Gemma from school and then brings them back to her house. At the end of her shift, Oanh picks up the girls at Betty’s and then gets them ready for school the next day. Then the cycle starts all over again. It is a lot of work taking care of twins. I think these two women are convinced that their 12-hour shifts at the hospital are easier than the 12-hour shift with the twins. Olivia has learned to change a diaper, can pick up the babies and feed them. So, Olivia is a big help when she is not in school. Gemma’s job is to entertain them and make sure they don’t crawl where they shouldn’t. Both girls are shining stars in school. I think Gidu encouraged them by enrolling them in IXL. This is an online education program that is fun for the girls. IXL sends Nasr progress reports. Don’t tell the girls, but I think Nasr has big plans for them, meaning he wants them to be engineers. We are giving them a chance to see plays at the theatre—Tarzan and Grinch! The only problem is that we don’t get to see them enough. Between our travels and life in general, it is hard to get together. We try once a month. This holiday we will spend almost a month with them. Yipppeee!

Jasmine (Drum roll) and Tommy Pippin are engaged! Tommy is an intelligent, resourceful, and kind man. Oh, it also helps that he is very handsome. We have never seen Jasmine so happy. She is very excited to marry the man of her dreams. She says she looks forward to a wonderful life together with Tommy. Her Uncle Gamal and Aunt Magda hosted a beautiful engagement party at their country club in San Juan Capistrano last April. It was such a wonderful affair that people said that the engagement party should have been their wedding. Nope. They don’t know Jazz. Their wedding will be on April 21, 2024. So, Jasmine and I have been very busy planning and finding vendors for the occasion. Do you realize how many vendors you need for a wedding—more than I count! At this point, I think no one wonders why Nasr hasn’t really retired yet. My bridal planning skills are a little rusty. I haven’t used them since Amira and Matt were married in 2004—yup 20 years ago. At Thanksgiving, when we were with Amira and Matt, Jazz got the chance to show Tommy the spectacular monuments, (there is still a lot more for him to see next time), George Washington University where she attended, and the best for Tommy was the Steven Udar-Hazy Air Museum. His favorites were the SR71 Blackbird and the Discovery Space Shuttle. Jazzy is still teaching but hopes to find a teaching job in which she can work from home.

Hopefully, next year we can take the whole family to Egypt and give them a chance to see some of their ancestral history. We are cruel parents and grandparents, but we are not going first class next year. We are looking forward to a good year and bringing Tommy into our family. (Make sure you don’t warn him ahead of time.)

We wish everyone a happy, healthy, and peace-filled New Year.