

December 2019

Dear Family and Friends,

This year we remember a kind and good man who brightened the earth for nearly 90 years—Matt's father, Bill Churchill. Bill served the community all his life, delivering Meals on Wheels with his wife, Maggie, even after his own step became unsteady. I'm particularly indebted to him, as he came out of retirement to cook and care for me when I was pregnant with twins and confined to bedrest. He took the train from Connecticut to NYC and enjoyed sampling city life and exploring the streets of Manhattan while I napped. Bill managed to love his family even more than he loved ice cream, which says a lot. He was also a good writer, with a casual, plain style that disguised his careful craftsmanship, and a self-deprecating sense of humor that belied his deep intelligence. It's to him that we owe the tradition of Matt's holiday letters, because Matt inherited not only his father's kindness and love of good food, but also his ability to tell a good story (occasionally at my expense!).



We also remember Melinda Smith. If Bill helped bring Luke and Thomas to term with the nourishing meals he prepared for me, Melinda helped raise them from the age of 0 to 4. She walked them to their first days of preschool, easing their fears and tears by telling them to think "happy thoughts"—you know, about trains and airplanes. Their friends at preschool said, "Luke and Thomas have two mommies." Melinda was loud, brash, and sometimes stubborn—or maybe that was me. She was loyal and steadfast in her relationships and sense of right and wrong. She loved to talk and laugh, took great pride in her daughter and grandson, and bore an unfair share of health woes with courage and fortitude.

Not so long ago, she began calling me as her sister. I felt that way, too.

So we are bereft this December, and you may be grieving, too, because as you've probably guessed, Matt's funny bone isn't quite in tune with the season, which has left me to assume the duty of writing the holiday missive.

But the fact is we have plenty to celebrate this year. Heck, it's the "Year of the Manager," as all three of our sons have assumed managing positions: Thomas (23) is a visual content manager at the website wikiHow, Luke (23) is a project manager at EAB, an education consulting firm, and most recently, Zac (18) got elected van manager for the Tufts Wilderness Organization. That's right, our "Cookie Boy" has become "Van Man," and we couldn't be prouder!

Zac graduated from North Mecklenburg High School in June and rode away to Boston in August to attend Tufts University. Always a contented, good-natured kid, he's happier than ever, with a compatible roommate, a close-knit squad of friends who hail from far and wide, and mind-opening courses in environmental studies, the sociology of race, and the culture, history, and cuisine of Puerto Rico. Living up to his grandfather's tradition, Zac particularly enjoyed the cuisine part, and has become an expert navigator of Boston's tangled streets in search of the best bagels, oysters, and cannoli.

Thomas moved to San Francisco, squeezing as many people as possible into an apartment in order to make it arguably affordable. His job has many perks, including trips to the Philippines to meet with artists and videographers, weekends off to hike in the mountains and surf on Sundays, and, I kid you not, an office with a free laundry facility. We all want his life.

Luke inhabits our nation's Capitol, sharing an apartment near Dupont Circle, where he can walk to work, Trader Joe's, and trivia night; bike around the Mall or to Georgetown; and hike in Rock Creek Park. He just took the LSATs, and if EAB wouldn't keep him so busy with projects, he might actually apply to law school. (Matt asks: Law school? Have you not heard all the lawyer jokes your Dad has been subjected to?!)

Matt continues to slug away in tireless devotion to The Law and just completed his three-year term as Chair of the Board of the Davidson Housing Coalition. I'm looking forward to some work-free weekends with him in 2020, as I completed a faculty "boot camp" this fall that taught me some great time management strategies. I'm still a work in process at a mere half-century + 3 years old, but hoping to improve.

Life is not all work and no play. We celebrated Zac's graduation with a family vacation to Hawaii. Zac got to pick the location, and I was pleased with his choice, eager for a leisurely alternative to the forced marches of our recent National Park tours. I pictured myself idling on a beach all day, occasionally setting down my Mai Tai to dip in the ocean and snorkel with sea turtles. And while we did sample some gorgeous beaches and even met a few turtles, we had just as many grueling adventures, climbing volcanic mountains, sliding down muddy paths to a not-so-hidden waterfall, and racing across a steep and rocky trail to catch the last shuttle back to town. We Churchills also indulged in raucous fun with our friends the Maldonados during a week in Kauai (#Churchnado). On the way home, Matt and I stopped in Colorado, catching a concert at Red Rocks and hiking in the mountains with Davidson friends.

We also attended fabulous weddings and fun family reunions. In May, niece Lucy Churchill married Chris Monti; a week later, nephew Ben Shoudy married Sage Guarnieri; and in August, we enjoyed both Indian and Western ceremonies at the wedding of close family friends. Zac flew home for Thanksgiving, and my Dad and his wife Ruth drove down to feast with our NC family and friends, while Thomas and Luke set off on a road trip out west through deserts and canyons, catching spectacular sunsets and dodging snowstorms.



The empty nest is about to get full again as 16 members of the Churchill clan gather to commemorate Bill. You know there'll be great stories, lots of music and laughter, and plenty of good food and wine, as a fitting tribute to a man who taught us to enjoy life to the fullest and love each other unconditionally.

We extend that love to all of you.