

December 2020

Dear Family and Friends,

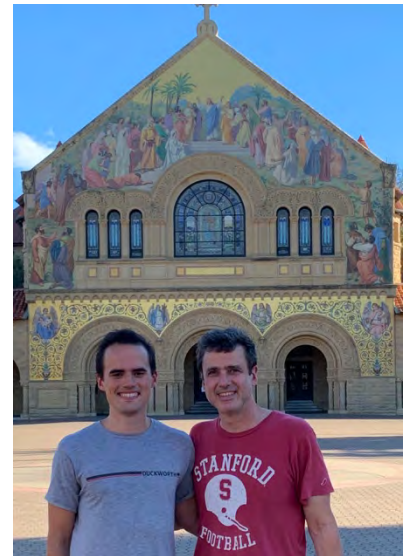
2020 was filled with more ups and downs for our family than any year I can remember. It was a true “circle of life” year, where we mourned the loss of our sister-in-law, Jackie, after a long struggle with lung cancer, and welcomed the arrival of our first great niece, Josephine.

We kicked off the year with a Churchill family gathering in Davidson to celebrate my Dad’s life. My three brothers and their families joined us and my stepmom, Maggie, for a few days of remembrance, food, music, feasting, museums, chow-downs, breweries, and grub. There were two highlights for me. One was a memorial service for my Dad where 16 of us sat in a circle and took turns talking about what he meant to us, interspersed with music and poetry. My Dad’s legacy was on full display as his grandchildren spoke so eloquently about his impact on their lives.

The second highlight was, of course, dinner. We organized a two-night foodie competition between the older generation and the younger generation judged by Maggie. The older crowd pulled out all the stops with a Mediterranean feast of roast leg of lamb, chicken Marbella, shrimp scampi, spanakopita, and innovative salads and desserts, all cooked to perfection. It had variety, spotless presentation, and fine wine accompaniments.

What did the kids cook? . . . Tacos. OK, they might argue that homemade tortillas, a mixture of salsas (including a tasty mole sauce), a variety of shrimp tacos, chicken enchiladas, fajitas and accompaniments, combined with killer desserts, constituted a bit more than tacos. But that was the gist of the meal. To our shock and dismay, after being plied with fine tequila and serenaded by the mariachi tunes of Chris Monti (our niece Lucy’s husband), Maggie somehow voted for the younger crowd. We challenged the decision, storming about the kitchen with “Stop the Steal” signs and asking whether the tequila had made Maggie’s decision a true “absentee ballot.” But Chief Justice Maggie affirmed her decision despite the lack of evidence we assembled to support our claims.

The pandemic notwithstanding, we skipped town for two road-trips this summer. Buoyed by negative COVID tests and armed with masks, hand-sanitizer, and hospital-grade disinfectant, we transported Maggie to her cottage in Mattapoisett, MA, for 4th of July. In August, we drove across country with Luke to set him up for his first year of law school at Stanford. (Yes, we somehow managed to raise another lawyer in our family—try not to question our parenting skills.) The highlights of the trip were visits to Luke’s old haunts in St. Louis (Wash U, Botanical Gardens, Kaldi’s coffee); takeout BBQ in Kansas City; hikes and visits with friends at the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs and in Bryce Canyon; and a poolside Mexican food feast at my brother Ian and Pamela’s house in Burbank, CA, where we were joined by Zac and his girlfriend, Maria. We also had a great visit with Thomas on a hike in Pacifica followed by a delicious outdoor meal in a restaurant up the street from his apartment in the “Dogpatch” neighborhood in San Fran. Are you starting to get a feel for the role of food in my COVID existence?





The boys are doing great. Luke finished his two-year stint as a researcher/manager at EAB, an education consulting firm in Washington, D.C., before starting law school. Despite having only one in-person class, he seems energized by his studies and passionate about finding a way to use a law degree for educational and social justice causes. It's been nice to see Luke and Thomas reconnect in the Bay area: they took a distance-defying road trip early in the summer from San Francisco to the Olympic Peninsula and over to Glacier National Park and back. Thomas lives a whirlwind existence in the Bay area where he works at wikiHow.com, focusing on video development. In his spare time, he hiked, backpacked, and ran his first marathon on trails in the Marin headlands. Eager to explore new trails, he spent October working remotely with friends in an Airbnb near Park City, Utah. Zac survived a forced return home for the second half of his spring semester at Tufts, during which we learned that college students with girlfriends in San Diego live on a waking schedule of 12:00 noon to 3:00 a.m. We became empty nesters once again in June when Zac left to work as a camp counselor in Texas. This fall, he was back at Tufts, taking courses in sociology and environmental studies (and twice weekly Covid tests). Reflecting the longhaired, grizzled mountain man he has become, he was recently elected hiking director of Tufts Mountain Club.

Suzanne and I continue in our respective jobs at Davidson College and my law firm, Robinson Bradshaw. We've staked out the dining room and sun porch as new home offices and feel very fortunate to have interesting work despite the day-to-day challenges and stresses. Suzanne completed her 5-year, NEH funded project to develop an academic website on the avant-garde poet and artist, Mina Loy, and rose to the challenges of teaching in person and online. She and her sister Elizabeth co-hosted a fabulous Zoom 80th birthday party for her father, Fred, where she — and her Zoom navigation skills — broke down at the sight of friends and family, many of whom she hadn't seen in years, gathered together on screen. We had a much smaller Thanksgiving gathering with my brother Bruce and his husband Scott, but we had lots of laughs (plus a 20-pound turkey and 3 homemade pies!).

Although we've found plenty of joy, 2020 has not been easy. So many have been challenged by death, illness, and social isolation. And our country has been strained by racist violence and political upheaval and dissonance. In the face of these difficulties, we treasure you. We value the times we've been able to spend together, across fire pits or the internet, and we look forward to the time when we can have that in-person dinner party and give each other hugs. We hope we'll be able to do that with many of you in 2021, but until then, we'll just have to appreciate the small things in life . . . takeout tacos anyone?!

Lots of love,

Matt, Suzanne, Thomas, Luke, and Zac



Thanksgiving family Zoom (in which Suzanne, overwhelmed with joy at the sight of all three sons, forgets that she could just take a screen shot).