

It's tenure year for Suzanne, and you know what that means? It means that you get to read a holiday letter from a lawyer instead of an English professor! (I'll try to avoid the legalese, and you'll just have to imagine that Suzanne is writing this letter with her characteristic verve and wit, *mutatis mutandis* - oh, sorry.)

The big event of the year, of course, was that I ran the Cooper River Bridge 10-K in Charleston, S.C.

Oh yeah, and we had another kid.

Zachary Gates Churchill was born on June 16, 2001 weighing 6 lbs. 11 oz and measuring 20-3/4 inches. By the next morning, however, the pediatrician informed us that Zachary weighed 8 lbs. 2 oz., which led us to suspect that either the scale was wrong, someone had managed to switch those hospital bracelets during the night and we were stuck with Bubba Hogsfart's kid, or Zac took after his daddy. Fortunately, the latter appears to be the case. We're proud to say Zac's already at the top of his class - 85th percentile for weight and 90th percentile for height.

Zac is a happy, easy-going, and extremely social baby (he can't help it with Thomas and Luke avidly competing for his attention). His face just lights up with a huge two-tooth grin whenever a family member or his wonderful nanny, Brenda Alexander, enters the room. I swear that to see him smile is worth every sleepless hour Suzanne endures nursing him. Zachary shares his nanny with Mathilde Borax, a cute, petite six-month old who flirts shamelessly with him. Our next-door-neighbors also have a 4-month old son who visits regularly, leading my brother Bruce and his friend Scott to conclude, on a recent visit filled with awkward conversations with breast-feeding moms, that we could start a branch of La Leche League right in our living room! Worse things could certainly happen.

While I was training for the big bridge race (if that pack of Kenyans hadn't shoved me aside, I could've been right there at the end), Suzanne was finishing her sabbatical and fending off comments like "Now aren't you the pertiest little pregnant girl I've ever see-eeen!" (Suzanne's mental response: "If you rub my stomach again, I am going to hurt you!") I have to admit, she was pretty cute with that little basketball tummy of hers (did I mention that Duke won the national championship this year yet?) and her stylish maternity ensembles—well...that's probably why we got into all this kid trouble in the first place.

It's been a big year for Suzanne. Aside from pushing out that 6 or 8-pound baby (it took only a miraculous 3 hours—too quick for an epidural, unfortunately—but then again I didn't have any painkiller for my shin splints either), Suzanne received a positive reader's report from Northwestern University Press on her book manuscript, taught again at Davidson this fall, and prepared a massive file for her tenure review. And believe it or not, Luke and Thomas still recognize her and even call her "Mommy" from time to time (she's a great mom). Of course, she didn't run a 10-K this year (but who's counting). Her envy did expose itself the day after the race as she reviewed the results and informed me that 67 girls in the 11-13 year old age group managed to squeeze past me in the last mile - "and, oh, you did manage to beat 53% of the over 70 year old age group - congratulations!"

Luke and Thomas were on my side, however. They've reached that fantastic age of 5 where Daddy can convince them that it's fun to gang up on Mommy. Reaching 5, of course, also means that the twins headed off to kindergarten looking quite dapper with their yellow backpacks and velcro sneakers. Davidson Elementary is an excellent school located a 1/4 of a mile down the street. At first, Suzanne or I walked them to the door of their respective kindergarten classes, but after a few weeks Luke and Thomas sternly informed us that we must part ways at the top of the hill above the school so that they could gain their independence (i.e. so that they could goof around in front of the school until their friends' school buses arrive and then run madly for the classroom to avoid any tardy notices). They both love school, and it's pretty amazing to see how quickly their fine motor skills (writing, drawing etc.), reading comprehension, and knowledge of Pokemon have improved. Unfortunately, Suzanne and I can no longer spell out "I-C-E C-R-E-A-M" or "V-I-D-E-O" or "T-H-E-Y A-R-E D-R-I-V-I-N-G M-E I-N-S-A-N-E", without Luke or Thomas saying "Relax dad, some Ben and Jerry's and a Clifford video will do just the trick."

The age of 5 is a magical age where innocence, excitement, and explosive growth intersect. Thomas has reached a stage where he can't help but talk in superlatives: "Do You Hear What I Hear" is the BEST song I've ever heard in my life"; "Aunt Elizabeth's shrimp scampi is the BEST meal I have ever tasted—ever!!!"; "I wish that EVERY day could be as good as this one"; "Daddy is the FASTEST runner ever!" (I might have invented one of those). Thomas is a sensitive kid who continues to be fascinated by science and nature: "Dad, did you know that the Cheetah is the fastest land-based animal." - "Yes, Thomas, you've mentioned that." "It can run up to 70 miles an hour." -- "That's really interesting, Thomas." - "If we were driving on the highway and a cheetah was running beside us, it would pass our car." - "As long as mommy's not driving, Thomas." - "Dad, I need more animal encyclopedias for Christmas..."

Luke has captured his Dad's ability to focus wholeheartedly on the task at hand and completely tune out everyone else in the room when he is reading books, drawing pictures, or building Lego vehicles. A happy-go-lucky kid who loves to clown around, Luke entertains Zachary endlessly by making faces or shouting "Nevah fear, Supah-T-bone is here!" (which I understand is a reference to the Clifford cartoon and not to a cut of beef). Luke's also perfected such expressions as "See you soon, Mr. Loon" (which I believe refers to the water fowl he saw in Maine and not to my mental state) and "Boys rule, girls drool" (which, although a favorite of mine, is unfortunately undermined by our youngest male offspring).

Luke, Thomas and I have joined "Indian Guides" together, a cub-scout knockoff with a Native American theme. Aside from the chance to wear homemade vests and feathered headbands, the highlights of Indian Guides include overnight camping with a passel of 5-year-old boys and picking out your own Indian names. We're the "Paw" family: Cheetah Paw (our resident cheetah expert), Panther Paw (that's Luke—named after the local football team), and Tiger Paw (or Pa Paw). Suzanne (a.k.a. "Squaw Paw") recommended "Bear Belly" for me, but I just had to resist. Aside from tribe pow-wows, I've kept busy with a bit of lands conservancy volunteer work and my corporate law gig.

We hope that the New Year finds all of you happy and healthy. We love visitors (i.e. potential babysitters) and hope that we will have the opportunity to see many of you in the upcoming year.

Love, Matt, Suzanne, Luke, Thomas, and Zachary