

Here we go again! Last year you were subjected to a lawyer-drafted holiday letter because Suzanne was too busy preparing her academic file for tenure review. Well, guess what? Suzanne was granted tenure by Davidson College in April (hurray!). And you know what that means? Academic freedom, starting, in her mind, with freedom from writing this letter.

I tried to tell Suzanne that there's nothing academic, intellectual, or educational about writing *our* holiday card. "Well, then, it's a perfect job for you, Matt" she replied. So off I went to the internet in search of nasty professor jokes to use in my pedestrian, mundane missive (ok, she helped me with a few of those words, but most of this letter is mine, all mine!).

You know, professors just aren't the figures of ridicule that they deserve to be. The internet lacks a good stash of academic jokes. Astonishingly, I did find plenty about lawyers. But since they weren't funny at all, I won't include them here.

The internet did, however, spit out an interesting article from the Chronicle of Higher Education listing a few common professor expressions and paraphrases of their real meanings.

<u>Expression</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
"The answer to your question is beyond the scope of this class."	"I don't know."
"You'll have to see me during my office hours for a thorough answer to your question."	"I don't know."
"In answer to your question, you must recognize that there are several disparate points of view."	"I really don't know."

Just as Suzanne started to feel pretty good about becoming an associate professor, a Charlotte Observer photographer captured her riding on her bicycle to the Davidson graduation in her cap and gown, which includes a flowing black and orange hood that dangles down her back. Unfortunately, the flesh-colored orange border of the hood gathered about Suzanne's bike seat and, I kid you not, the talk show hosts on a local sports radio show spent a segment the next morning debating whether our heroine was exposing her derriere. Our next-door neighbor, Charlotte, came to the rescue with the perfect retort: "Yeah, and did you see how tan it was?" I'm proud to say that Suzanne's class enrollments have never been higher.

Aside from our annual trek to New England, we remained largely homebodies this year, planning our "not-so-big" but ever-expanding home renovation and celebrating our tenth wedding anniversary with a takeout Italian meal (while tending to sick kids).

"What did you give each other for your anniversary, Matt?" I'm glad you asked. I gave Suzanne an original print of a California coast oak by the photographer whose exhibit was displayed in the museum where we had our wedding reception. Suzanne gave me a gym bag.

"Why did you give Matt a gym bag for your tenth anniversary, Suzanne?" "In answer to your question, you must realize that there are several disparate points of view." Actually, Suzanne and I celebrated our anniversary by purchasing a set of poplar tree oil paintings by a local artist and friend, Felicia Van Bork, which, with the California coast oak and a prize-winning dogwood tree painted by Thomas, have turned our house into a veritable forest for the eyes.

"Thomas," you say? "You mean, you have children and you haven't mentioned them yet?" In my defense, I figured that if I started with Luke, Thomas, and Zachary, people might just lose interest once they got to the parental aspects of the letter.

Luke, now six, is becoming quite an entertainer. He recently starred as a badger in Jan Brett's "The Mitten" (he can really dig) and as a knight in the recent church choir Christmas spectacular. While he hasn't yet graduated to speaking parts in plays, he more than makes up for that at home, where he gives us a running commentary on his latest thoughts, often preceded by "Can I

tell you something?" After spending a weekend with Luke, our friends Antigone and Jeff decided that he should have his own talk show entitled, "Can I Tell You Something?" But Luke's talk show wouldn't have any guests: just Luke and his captive studio audience.

If Luke could be a talk show host, his twin brother Thomas could be a contestant on a "Jeopardy" show in which the only categories were "Wild Animals," "Oceans," "Miscellaneous Science Factoids," "Pokemon" and "Things Kids Know about Star Wars Without Having Seen the Movies." He's an avid reader and budding scientist who's still young enough to greet his dad with a big hug everyday after work. Thomas has just started to hit the age where he's aware of what's "cool" and "not cool" in the eyes of his peers. Fortunately, I've managed to keep Suzanne cordoned off from his friends so that he still thinks she's ok.

I'm struggling to come up with a game show that features an 18-month-old baby who scoots everywhere on his bottom, grins, eats a lot, and dances like the gopher/woodchuck in the movie "Caddyshack." (Come to think of it, if you can find such a part for a 36 year-old, it might work for me as well.) One of our neighbors, favorably impressed by Zac's ability to scoot about on concrete sidewalks, recently gushed, "Well . . . he's certainly got the toughest bottom in the neighborhood . . ." That's my boy! (It's not as tan as Suzanne's, however). Zachary spends his days showered with affection from our loving nanny, Brenda Alexander, and from his "honorary twin," Mathilde Borax.

That's about all I can tell you about the Churchill family. You'll have to visit if you want more information. We wish you all a joyous holiday season, and if you're wondering whether I'll write next year's epistle, "The answer to your question is beyond the scope of this letter."

Lots of love,

Matt, Suzanne, Luke, Thomas, and Zachary Churchill