

## Final Answer

(Based upon one of those stories told and retold around the Internet...perhaps you've seen a version!)

As many of you are aware, I am now down in south-central Tennessee, working as the Deputy to the Public Affairs Director for our nation's leading research and development Air Force laboratory. We "test everything before flight".

With a Starbucks nine point four miles up the road from our front gate, I still miss the Starbucks on Ford Parkway some nine hundred and so miles to the north and east. The place was small, cramped a lot of times, with those wonderful smells of coffee, perfumed and not-so-perfumed people and sugary snacks in the air. My fellow coffee drinkers have all moved onward -- for they don't have much of a reason for stopping by as much as they used to. I cannot remember the last time I have been there.

During the December holiday season -- most people call it "Christmas" -- I get cards from older friends who have not forgotten the age-old tradition of sending greeting cards with a message inside. Some people go overboard, however. They include several page chronicles of their family's life during the past year. These people know that I really enjoy reading -- no, I LOVE reading -- about the school news, the divorce and trials of relatives only known from previous years' cards in which they met at a bar, got married in Vegas, had two kids and then discovered that they did not know enough information about each other to make that life-long decision. About the surgeries and which parts had to be taken out, replaced, stapled shut and/or gently dealt with. About the untimely -- or timely deaths and why.

Gives me great "research material" for stories, or characters -- or both!

My great friend Carlotta sent me a card with a photo of her and her not-so-new husband, both dressed in Santa garb, each holding a glass of something bubbly. She doesn't drink, so my assumption is that it's ginger ale or one of those non-alcoholic wine drinks. The verbiage was "Have a Merry One -- and a Happy One too!" As I opened the card, the latest edition of the Svengard (that's his last name) Times fell out.

There was a separate page just for me. I put aside the Times for a future bathroom break. I unfolded the single page addressed to "Michale"

"Do I call you Deputy Dawg, that name I can NEVER pronounce (it doesn't look like ANYTHING YOU say it is...), or just "Hey You?!", " the letter started.

"I miss our coffee-clathes, Mike. They were fun!

As you can read from all of the other crap, we're doing fine and so is the rest of the family. I return to what you call the "Big Law Firm" after Christmas. It's been a great break and hubby's family is rich in tradition and storytelling...so I fit right in!

Since you're down there with the Hatfields and McCoys -- no, that's Kentucky -- um, Dolly and Trent someone or another -- I thought I would provide you with some REAL NEWS from up here in central Minnesota. I had the opportunity to do some lawyering for a family here in Alex (Alexandria). I thought the case was truly cut and dried -- we plead insanity, the judge orders some tests, we don't pass them, the woman goes to the nut house where she really belongs. No value judgment, Mikey boy, just what she wanted and truthfully, where she belongs.

One of these days, I'm gonna have to become a judge.

So, we're just about ready to wrap up the case, and I bring Mrs. Wingnut onto the stand. What do you always say -- "Scouts' Honor"? Anyway, this is the TRUTH as to what she said to me and everyone else in court:

Me: Can you explain what occurred on the evening of November 26th?

Wingnut: Chester and I are watching Who Wants To Be A Millionaire -- you know the show; you guess what the answers are? It's the new version, not the one with the old guy Jeeves or whatever the hell his name is...while we were in bed.

Me: Regis.

Wingnut: Yeah. Him... NO, not him. Some broad they got from a news show somewhere.

Me: Meredith Viega.

Wingnut: Whatever. Okay. We're in bed. So Chester turns to me during the commercials and say "Do you want to have sex?"

"No," I answer back to him. "I'm waiting for the show to come back on." I then continue to watch the commercials.

He then asked "Is that your final answer?" I didn't even look at him, but straight at the TV set. He KNOWS that this is my favorite TV show this time of night. I want to see if I can win the money.

So I said "Yes. Final answer."

Then he said, "Then I'd like to phone a friend."

That was the last thing he said, Your Honor, because I bent down under the bed, found the shotgun and shot him right there in the chest."

Me: Recess, Your Honor!"

It was too late. If they weren't smiling, they were outright laughing. Not me.

The judge suspended this woman's sentence and sent her to a half-way home in another state. I need to become a Judge. Take care Mikey -- stay outta trouble and write back soon! Call me please when you get back into town!

Your Fellow Coffee Drinker and storyteller, Carlotta"