

## Oliver the Smarty Pants

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Oliver is 20 months old. He's been in potty training for the past couple of months. He started out very interested, but his enthusiasm has waned.

However, Oliver sometimes chooses to be *very* smart about potty training. Katie told me she can depend on Oliver to inform her he has to go "pee pee" at specific times: when they're in church and when it's bedtime.

Reminds me of when I was a kid and my brother Danny had to "go poop" after supper when it was time to do the dishes.

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When Oliver was at my house last Friday, he was sitting on the potty chair and as usual, he signed "book." I fetched him a book that I soon realized was too big for him to hold and balance.

No matter.

Ever so casually, Oliver shot out his left leg to hold the spine of the book, flexing his little foot in its little white sock to keep the book steady. Each of his hands held one side of the book. With his foot holding the book in place, Oliver could easily turn pages and read like a proper man at toilet.

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Oliver's language has progressed beyond a simple list of words or sounds.

He aims to please. He will try ANY word or phrase, often with hilarious results.

Last Friday, Nov. 3, he spent all day at my house, as usual. At lunchtime, I put some food on his high chair tray. He calmly said, "Thank you, Mémère."

I was shocked. I had never heard him say "Thank you" before. Even in baby sign language, it was a phrase he resisted.

[Later, Katie explained that Charlie insisted Oliver say "Thank you" at every house when they went trick-or-treating the week before. Since then, Oliver has become Grateful Boy.]

Back to last Friday. It was my birthday and Mike and I decided to go out for a fish fry. Oliver was still with us (to our delight), so he went too.

We were in a local bar-restaurant and the waitress had just served our dinners. Oliver calmly reached over and nabbed a French fry from my plate.

“Thank you, Mémère,” he said, and put the fry right in his mouth.

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Oliver had never eaten French fries before, but he listens to *everything* and must have heard Mike and me talking about “fries.”

After snatching a more few fries off my plate (and thanking me for them), Oliver said, “Mmmmm, fries.”

Homer Simpson couldn’t have sounded more thrilled about doughnuts than Oliver did about French fries that evening.

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We were eating our meal and chatting in the restaurant, when all of a sudden, Oliver spouted something that sounded like “Doh Patos Tuhdun.” He repeated it several times.

Oliver flung his arms up on the “Tuhdun” part, which was the hint Mike and I needed to finally figure out what he was saying.

Not long ago, Brian or Charlie had converted Oliver’s “So Big” gesture to “Touchdown.”

So Mike and I got it – Oliver was saying “Go Packers, touchdown!”

But why?

We looked to where Oliver was gazing – it seemed to be in the area over a pool table nearby. There was a stained glass style billiards lamp hanging from the ceiling. On the lamp was the Packers logo – a Packers helmet with the famous “G.”

Mike and I looked at each other. How could Oliver be smart enough to identify the logo and say “Go Packers?”

Then we searched harder where he had been looking. There was a television suspended from the ceiling, showing a basketball game. It must have looked like a Packers game to Oliver.

Later, Charlie explained, “When the TV is on, it’s a Packers game.”

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When Charlie was a toddler, he mystified Mike and me for weeks with an unintelligible phrase he said over and over while doing a sort of repeated push-up.

Eventually we deciphered the phrase. Charlie was mimicking part of a song on a Sesame Street album. In a song about a grocery store, a shopper interjected a not-sung phrase: "Who stole my rutabaga?" The shopper sounded full of emotion. It must have been the emotion that caught Charlie's imagination....

.... Just like "Go Packers, touchdown!" caught his son's imagination 28 years later.