

As I honour Christmas 2003 in my heart, I think fondly of friends like you and the personality traits you possess that qualify you to receive the alternative Inglis newsletter.

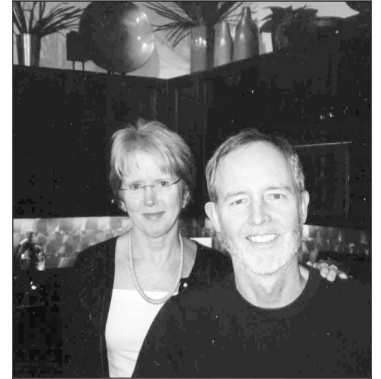
*austincitylofts.com*

You probably remember from last year's letter that now that the kids are gone, Ian and I are selling our house and moving to a downtown "loft" (really a flat), which you can see at the above Web site. With two garage sales and lots of donations we rid ourselves of all non-essentials — an inconceivable relief. We'll move when the building's finished in March 2004, thereby bringing to real life the '70s sitcom *The Jeffersons*.

Ian worked his tail off all year readying the house to put on the market in September, and he of course did all the work himself and has everything in absolutely perfect working order and condition.

He's convinced, however, that a suicidal cult from the Animal World has conspired to spite us for selling the house. Since the FOR SALE sign went up in the yard: 1) a large bird (or small pterodactyl) flew into and broke the workshop window which Ian had just replaced; 2) a frog jumped under the wheel of someone backing out of the driveway, making an ungodly mess; 3) dogs have decided that our front yard is the neighborhood Toilet of Choice, and 4) a wild herd of small rodents established residence in our attic. Armed with industrial-strength traps and peanut butter, Ian offed the entire clan, one by one, proudly marking a notch in his belt for each one.

So far, the house has not sold, but we have three more months to sell it lest we pay two mortgages. We remain hopeful and just this side of hysterical.



*in model kitchen*

### ANIMAL TALES

Ian and I have worked all year to prepare Snowy and Catticus Finch for their new life as uptown pets. How? Mainly by wringing our hands, but also by watching *Rear Window* to see how the crazy lady cleverly lowered her dog in a basket down to the ground to relieve himself. Thing is, she lived on the second floor, and our place is on the eighth. That's about 100 feet up, so we worry about windy days and the inevitable questions from neighbors. Until we perfect a method, we do have special access to the Town Lake Trail, which should help with Snowy, but we're skeptical of Catticus taking to the leash.



### IAN

Ian is still practicing criminal defense law, lunches with his office buddies, has taken up pretty spectacular cooking, walks a lot and is still regularly mistaken for homeless.

Things went pretty smoothly with Ian's house prep until he decided to paint the workshop using a spray rig. In 10 minutes he used six gallons of paint for only two sides of the workshop, while also covering with paint every square millimeter of his exposed skin, clothes, cap, goggles, mask, landscaping around the workshop and the neighbor's fence. Yet another in a long list of reasons to ditch the house. We feel like incompetent gerbils running in a wheel just trying to keep up with it.

### TONI

Still doing neonatal intensive care nursing and a monthly nursing publication for the hospital network where I work. And still doing free-lance gigs for the *American Journal of Nursing* and still volunteering on several boards, including MHMR.

### ST. VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE

This year, with the kids gone, Ian and I have started watching the Food Network and trying wine with meals for the first time. I must say, wine does rather tend to bring out the old romance thing.

So, this year for Valentine's Day, I decided to get all romantic and treat Ian to champagne, rack of lamb and a spectacular chocolate cake. The whole week before V-Day, all Food Network shows were about chocolate, and I was inspired by Emeril's seemingly effortless four-layer Classic Black Forest Cake.

For those of you who have recently returned from the planet Zorcon, Emeril Lagasse is a New Orleans chef who is the center of the Food Network's universe. He has a cooking show taped live before a large audience of NASCAR dads — all of whom become ecstatic (cheering and clapping wildly) when he mentions the word "garlic" or adds liquor as an ingredient. This guy can cook, but apparently is afflicted by a ghastly disease that limits his vocabulary to the following: "Let's kick it up a notch!" "Oh, yeah, babe!" "Give it up for Doc Gibbs!" "Use your knobs...I'm not goin' there." And finally, "BAM!" as he sprinkles confectioner's sugar on, thereby ruining, a perfectly good dessert.

First I spent serious cash buying the ingredients and utensils, including an elevated cake turner. I made the cake according to Emeril's directions, but after the allotted baking time found the cake as flat as when I poured the batter. Taking deep breaths, I cooked it 10 minutes longer, thus making it not just flat, but now damn near impossible to get out of the pans. Once out and in 1000 pieces in the trash, I made from scratch an old faithful recipe for chocolate cake, which rose this time. After horizontal cuts to make four layers, I brushed on the kirsch syrup to soak for 30 minutes.



I then assembled the four layers with cherry filling in between, but when I added the frosting, in slow motion the cake and filling began to fall apart and down from the elevated perch onto the counter in chunks large and small, despite my frantically piercing it with wooden skewers and shrieking like Faye Wray in the original *King Kong*.

Ian came running out of the shower and into the kitchen only to be greeted with the mother lode of obscenities. He stood there still and silent, knowing instinctively that if he uttered a sound he would likely find himself the target of the remaining skewers. Not about to eat this cursed Dessert from Hell, I called our neighbor, Jack Lambrecht, to see if he and wife Marian would like what was left of it — bad presentation, but probably pretty tasty.

Jack came over, saw Ian and me and the mess on the counter, and ... commenced to laugh. Now this man, a Bronze-Starred World War II glider pilot who unarmed flew three combat missions beyond enemy lines into Normandy, Holland and Wesel (Germany), has seen real tragedy. So, he tends to be pretty good at putting things in perspective. Jack's reaction changed the mood, and we went on to have a romantic, delicious Valentine's evening, sans dessert.

The Dallas Morning News photo



#### BURTON, MELISSA & TALULA (KNIGHT)

Burton is still doing arboriculture in Dallas, and Melissa is still a neurosurgical perioperative nurse. Talula at 18 months is busy walking and saying a few words, such as "uh-oh" when say, a finger-food falls off her highchair, or when her father falls out of a tree.

Burton and Melissa are expanding and remodeling their home. *The Dallas Morning News* ran a great story in September on remodeling old houses and featured them. The article pointed out how much sense it makes to remodel and also how stressful it is. The article ended with a quote from Burton, "As of this moment, we are still married. That's a little remodeling humor," said Mr. Knight."

#### ERIN

Erin finished and passed her first year of medical school at UTMB (University of Texas Medical Branch) in Galveston. Two weeks into her second year, she called me:

Erin: "Bombed the cardiopulmonary exam. I quit. I'm outta here."

Toni: [long silence, eyes wide, unable to pick chin up off chest to

form words] ...

Erin: "Hello?"

Toni: "...Are you sure??"

Erin: "Yep. Already started packing."

Ian's supportive and respectful of Erin's decision; I'm getting counseling. She's back in Austin living in a house in east Austin with a roommate (for the first time). And she's getting back in touch with her creative side, doing lots of writing every day at the downtown coffee shop and making really nice works of art using all sorts of mixed media — watercolor, acrylic oils, spray paint, charcoals, markers, glitter, dirt, pebbles, leaves, small sticks, even small pieces of metal.

In medical school she developed an interest in mental health and is now working full-time as a clinical assistant in the ICU of the only private inpatient psychiatric hospital in Austin. This is rough stuff, but she likes it and is good at it.



#### JOHN

John finished his first year of Computer Engineering study at Texas A&M University and realized that while it was all very interesting, it wasn't something he wanted to pursue. Ian assured him (as he did Erin) that figuring out what you don't want to do is tremendously helpful in figuring out what you DO want to do. [That's a true story. How does a parent get to be that smart?]

So, now he's a sophomore in General Studies at A&M, passing his courses, running, and when he's not playing the guitar works half-time as a waiter for Texas A&M Catering. He has to wear a tuxedo and wash and starch-iron his own white tux shirt. (Imagining him doing that still cracks me up.) He tells wonderful stories about the great guys from India that he works with and the many faux-pas they make at work.

He makes darn good music on that guitar, and he remains, as always, a most delightful, laid-back, pleasant-to-be-around guy.

*Here's hoping you have a glorious 2004.*

*Love,  
the Ingleses*