

I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 1843

As we honour Christmas **2009** in our hearts, we think fondly of friends like you and the personality traits that you possess which qualify you to receive the alternative Inglis newsletter — the Greatest Gift of all.

Humiliation

I discovered awhile back that if you try to tell people in an Annual Report (holiday letter) how smart and accomplished you and your children are, they will either throw up, roll their eyes, hate you or all three. If, however, you tell them of your failure, misery, suffering and humiliation, everything's cool. Which is great, because there's always so much more of the latter.

For me, the 2009 Top Moment of Humiliation involved ... guess who. Yes. Ian.

On Oct. 21, CatFish Kelly, my good friend since grade school, sighted not one, but TWO Couch's Kingbirds at a local state park. *"These usually summer in the southern tip of Texas,"* he explained in an e-mail complete with photos.

"The similar and more common cousin is the Western Kingbird, which had flown south seven weeks before this sighting. So, wrong place, wrong time — cool!!"

"Note the green wash across the shoulders and the extent of the yellow breast way up to just under a white throat. P.S. If you can identify the grasshopper, please let me know."

Whereas I always speak in the hyperbole, the low-key CatFish always understates. Thus, hearing his excitement with the kingbird sighting, I was beside myself, even though I barely know the difference between a sparrow and a grackle. Eager to help him out, I fired his e-mail off to Burton, a world-class naturalist, and to Ian, a wannabe, hoping they could identify the grasshopper.

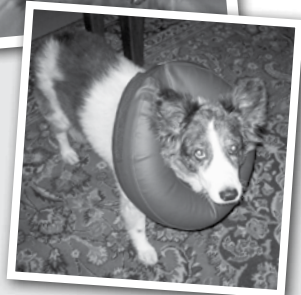
Within minutes, Ian, the busy criminal defense attorney, shot back an e-mail saying, *"Oh yeah, that's the yellow and brown ladder-backed pseudo petal-meddler. Quite rare! Favorite food of the Couch's Kingbird."*

I veritably BURST with pride that my BRILLIANT salutatorian/Phi Beta Kappa/award-winning/High Honors husband could instantly identify the grasshopper. Naturally, I shot his response off to CatFish and 100 of my most intimate friends saying, *"R u kidding me?? How does Ian know these things? He is a [bad word] genius!!"*

Within minutes, I get a reply from Burton, a world-class smart-ass. *"Good ID, Ian! I would add that it is also a pregnant female suffering from a lack of dietary manganese as shown by the scarlet bands on the femoral leg segments. Hardly worth eating."*

It was only then that I realized those girls were up to no good. Scarlet and seething, I vowed to ... one day ... get the hell even. I haven't yet. But hopefully next year's holiday letter will be replete with gruesome details of Ian's and Burton's Terrible Reckoning.

P.S. If you can ID CatFish's grasshopper, please let me know.



Snowy

At 13, Snowy is fine, just moves a little slower and doesn't see and hear like she used to. Here she's trying to look dignified despite being condemned to wear an apparatus while the hotspot she formed by compulsively licking healed.

Ian

As you can see, Ian has an extremely busy practice defending criminals. He can barely eke out the time to torture me with inane grasshopper e-mails, go on long walks, eat lunch out, yak with office mateys, clean out and fill the office birdbath



every day and backpack/car camp several times a year with his buds from high school.

He continues in his courageous quest to become the world's undisputed King of Inelegant Domestic Solutions.

Does your sunglasses case slide out of the outside pocket of your backpack? No problem! Just add roughness by wrapping the case in duct tape — and clearly label it 'top' and 'bottom.'

Is your pantry disorganized? No problem! Just put blue painter's tape on the top of each container, clearly naming the contents.

Need to store a double recipe of blueberry pancakes to enjoy in the coming weeks? No problem! Just stack them and throw them into the freezer, so when your wife wants a pancake for breakfast, all she has to do is put the frozen pancake block on a cutting board, raise a giant meat cleaver over her head, aim, pray and *voilà!* A smaller frozen pancake block splits away but doesn't lend itself to warming.

Need to warm up your coffee? No problem! Just stick it in the microwave and spend the next 20 minutes cleaning the nuked coffee off the walls.



Here's the selection of beer Ian bought for a weekend trip.



Toni

The biggest news this year is that I now have a paid gig with the *Austin American-Statesman*. Not only that, but free rein! I was told I could write about anything I want, whenever I want.

When I told my friend Jim Willmann, another smart aleck in my life, how much I would be making, he said, "*Toni, at 10 cents a word, you are worth every penny.*"

This year I was invited to write a healthcare blog for the hospital system where I work. It's been a lot of fun and has generated lots of intranet conversation. The cool thing is, Pulitzer-Prize winning political cartoonist Ben Sargent agreed to do the caricature for it.

Still doing the nursing publication, ride the scooter everywhere, won

a nice Healthcare Hero award from the *Austin Business Journal*, but I'm still surrounded from every conceivable angle by smart alecks.



holding first check for a *Statesman*-paid commentary



(by Burton)

Burton, Melissa & Talula Knight

Pete Newhall and I had made several wonderful trips to the Wind River Range of Wyoming. So, this year, we invited Mike Kullman and Jody Sandel, my family and Frankie the dog to go along with us.

As the wranglers took our supplies off the mules and said good-bye for seven days, something became immediately obvious to everyone. Large black floppy mosquitoes were amassing at an alarming rate.

The small gray Texas mosquitoes were no match for these mosquitoes. They worked in groups and came from all sides with a powerful anesthetic that could allow a group of ten to go unnoticed on any small patch of bare skin. We soon learned that they could easily bite through one layer of clothing in huge numbers before you even noticed.

We were totally unprepared for this. In the past two years, Pete and I never saw a single insect. Uncanny really. I remember thinking, "*What the hell are these fish eating?*" But we came two weeks earlier this year, the drought had abated and well ... death by exsanguination.

Tents were pitched, food was made, whiskey was passed, and we went to bed sore from the day-long horseback ride, exhausted and unsure. At this elevation, the night sky turns into a celestial aquarium of mind-blowing clarity. Stars, satellites, the Milky Way and meteorites become a humbling Technicolor firmament that fuses one to the universe.

The next morning we lingered in our tents fearing the flies and trying to decide what was more miserable, laying in bed aching or getting up. Fortunately, the decision was made for us because the instant the sun struck the tent, the temperature inside rose to about 150 degrees. *Let the fun begin!*

The fact that we were well positioned for the week in one of the Earth's most beautiful playgrounds surrounded by waters pullulating with trout was formidably mitigated by middle-aged aches and pains and the swarms of parasites. In these dark moments there was talk, not by me, of walking out due to the inability to sit quietly unmolested.

Instead, we learned to vest ourselves properly and managed to assess and ration our meager supplies of DEET. We also quickly learned to keep moving, physically and psychologically, or to position ourselves where there was a breeze, like the water's edge. Perfect for fishing! That evening, we prepared a legendary feast of trout and went to bed tired but encouraged.

Next day, we all set out early for a very high alpine lake about 4.5 miles away known by me and Pete to be full of the coveted golden trout. The walk up was so pleasant I literally found myself singing, "*The hills are alive*"

Cool, dry air dotted with the occasional snowflake surrounded you as the sun warmed your skin. The meadows were spongy and in full bloom. Water ran everywhere.

Talula walked nine miles that day and made me proud with her agility, endurance and positive attitude, although she looked like she had smallpox from the mosquitoes.

When we arrived at the lake, we began to fish. Huge goldens were visible, but were uninterested in our lures. Perhaps the glut of insects was a factor, but I finally managed to hook a fat, humped-back buck that was enough to feed us all.

Pretty soon a storm came up with lightning, snow, rain and wind. It looked pretty bad and we were pretty exposed, but I didn't want to leave. Pete and I stayed and fished while everyone else headed for camp. As it turned out, Pete and I enjoyed a beautiful day of fishing in the sun and snow while everyone else got rained on. It could have gone either way, though. That night we feasted on the delicious bright orange flesh of golden trout.

On the next-to-last night, a serious storm came in the middle of the night. Alpine lightning is so close and terrifying you never forget it. My attitude is, the chances of being struck by lightning are like, well, you know.

It sleeted and snowed all night and the rest of the next day on and off. But you know what? No bugs! And by the end of the day, it all dried up! We spent all day tending fire, drinking hot chocolate and fishing, finishing the day with a delicious fish stew with fresh carrots, onions, butter, wild rice and about a dozen little brook trout that Mike and I caught.

The next day we took Aleve ahead of time, which made a huge difference, and rode out with no bugs. Mike and Jody walked the whole way out with light daypacks and made it back hours before the rest of us. That night we feasted on pizza and beer at the hotel and spent the night clean and victorious. There is talk of doing it again.



from left, Mike, Jody & Pete



Erin (by Erin)

Hello! I'm living in Austin, loving working as a nurse for mental health consumers at the state hospital. And loving to see new places.



subway ridin' with
Anne and Megan



front row NYC Björk show

This year I hit up New York City visiting my friend and cousin Anne, my friend Megan and her City Chihuahua, Nibbler. We tore up the city: hard-core shoppin', art-viewin', nighttime show-goin', and Chinatown cupcakin'. Much, much fun. Thanks, Megan and Anne.

A few months pass, and I looked down from the top of the 620-foot Multnomah Falls west of Portland, Ore. onto the Columbia River Gorge. Huge mountains, sprawling forest, old trees. Ferns, mosses, lichens and all forms of green richness on the forest floor. All of this surrounding a buzzing city with pubs, skateboards, bicycles, city sidewalkers, pedicabs, light rail, gold-rush era buildings, Saturday markets, clowns, specialty donut shops, open people and an NBA stadium.

I like such contrast — rich wilderness and city buzz. And raincoats are bling-able, doable. So, in 2009, exploring was fun. In 2010, I see big trips to places with big mountains.

Domestically, Pouncy is thriving. He's increasingly skilled at breaking skin during his famous surprise pounce-attacks. Way to go, Pouncy! [Sigh, head in hands.]

Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah, etc., everyone. I love you, take good care and explore, explore in 2010!



Pounce attack in
the works

John

Just as we were thinking John might never figure out what he wants to do after his degree in History and Philosophy, he finds it and goes after it with awe-inspiring determination.

While driving a city bus around eight hours a day, John got a unique view of what emergency public safety responders do.

He arranged a couple of shift ride-outs with Emergency Medical Services and soon discovered that firefighters arrive on the scene first, as fire stations outnumber EMS stations. When he saw the firefighters in action, he knew instantly that was what he wanted.

It seemed like overnight he became an emergency medical technician, then a certified firefighter. Within three months, he got a job as firefighter at a small fire and rescue department near Austin. His next goal is to get on with the Austin Fire Department and become a dual paramedic/firefighter.

John volunteers with a local social service nonprofit, working in middle school after-school programs. The kids love his firefighting stories and his cooking projects with them. He's interviewing with Austin Independent School District to serve as a substitute teacher.



John with Ian's mom, The
Fabulous Roberta, aka
Mrs. Jack Inglis



John's the one standing,
not the one praying.

Here's wishing you a 2010 full of rare bird sightings, unexploded coffee, single blueberry pancakes to warm up, a celestial view of mind-blowing clarity, enough DEET, fresh-caught fish for dinner, and of course, lots of applause.

Love,
the Inglises