

*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 2006** in our hearts, we think fondly of friends like you and the personality traits which you possess that qualify you to receive the alternative Inglis newsletter.

snowy

Hello, Snowy here again this year. My human mom (Toni) is not too busy to write the letter this year, like she was last year. But she handed the job over to me, in a huff, complaining that everyone liked my letter last year better than any of hers.

I'm 10 years old now, and I still miss my animal brother, Catticus Finch. Toni got a bonus at work and spent it all on me at the vet's office, so I felt really special. I got a teeth cleaning and a benign growth removed from my elbow. The vet wanted me to wear a lamp shade around my neck, but thankfully mom resisted, saying I'd be the laughing stock of the dog community here at the lofts. I kept getting in trouble for licking it too much, though.

Life is pretty good. Mom takes me to the spa once a month where I get a shampoo, blow-dry, brushing, nails done and an occasional haircut. All she gets is a haircut every five weeks, prompting some of her friends to compare the difference and get a good laugh. I still enjoy my evening pig's ears on the balcony. I do still miss the yard a little, but when I get taken on my walks I roll in the grass if the sun's out — which makes mom laugh, but makes dad (Ian) shake his head.



Clampetts Inglises Go to the Texas State Fair

My favorite tale from the fair in Dallas was the hog races. All the hogs were eagerly lined up at the starting line: Pjork, Alfred Hitchhock, Leonardo DiPigrio, Oprah Swinefrey, Kevin Bacon, Snoop HoggyHog, Jean-Claude Van Hamme and Arnold Schnoutenheimer. With a bang they were off in a dead run. Everyone was cheering wildly, when suddenly tragedy struck. Oprah Swinefrey — who, poor thing, was utterly full from lactating, looking like she had just given birth to maybe 10 piglets — slipped on a slippery patch of saw dust. When she crashed down on her side you could hear a pin drop in the indoor arena. In an act of untold bravery and determination, Oprah struggled back onto her hooves and

took off running again, racing into the finish line a good 15 seconds after the last hog. The crowd was on their feet cheering wildly. Kevin Bacon came in first, but clearly Oprah was the winner.

ian

Dad still gets down on the rug to play with me after he walks home from work, and he still lets me lead the way on our nightly walks. Once again he refused to let me go to Big Bend with him and his buddy Erik. But I don't care because one year he made me wear booties, and every time I saw another dog I wanted to kill myself.

He and his office buddies let me go to Opal Divine's patio with them on Friday evenings. The wait staff bring me treats and iced water. And



Talula (front left) at the state fair. Just before the ride took off, she said to Burton sternly, "STOP taking my picture. I need to fly this plane."

John & Toni in front of the Texas Star ferris wheel (at the fair).

Talula and Ian at fair.



Ian in Big Bend.



Ian (note thumb splint) and Toni in Dallas.



Toni added to her Burly Man Photo Album.



Toni on the Yamaha Vino with Snowy in front of Ian's office.



they bring dad and his mateys their favorite cold amber liquid in a glass.

Dad is the president of the "loft" Homeowner's Association where we live, and he was on his way to a City Council meeting to argue for two young entrepreneurs the opportunity to open a juice bar in the neighborhood. He stepped off a curb and turned his ankle, falling on his thumb. Mom brought him some ice and got him moved to first on council agenda. He argued his case and won, then went to the ER. A screw, pin, bone anchor, cast and four months later, he seems to be all right. People said he was brave.

Dad has been working on the beginnings of a family Web site. Toni says if you want to see a bunch of goofy pictures, you should visit it at www.inglistexas.us.

toni

Mom is still working in neonatal and writing/editing for the hospital system where she works. Mom and Dad still pinch themselves asking how they got so lucky to live in such a great downtown place.

The big news this year is that she had a significant birthday ending in a zero. She turned 420 in dog years, and I tell her she doesn't look a day older. At first she was moping around about turning 420. Then gradually she got almost militant about it. She a) cut her hair even shorter, b) stopped coloring it and c) bought a scooter.

That scooter. Sometimes I think she likes it more than me. It gets 80 mpg, and she's put 2200 miles on it since March — and that's just doing errands and going to work! My human sister, Erin, keeps the car most of the time, but she wants a scooter now, too.

Most people like her short, silver hair. But some think it makes her look even older than 420. She likes it because she doesn't have to sit still in a chair on a regular basis, forking over dollars, and it tucks neatly into her helmet. Last week, though, she and my human sister Erin went out to eat. In the restroom after the meal, Toni was drying her hands at the far wall, and Erin opened the stall door and gasped. Toni asked her what the matter was, and Erin said, "Oh, it's you. At first I thought a little old man had wandered in here."

burton, melissa & talula (knight)

Burton here. Snowy's taking a break.

Melissa has switched surgery areas from neuro to orthopedics and is much happier there. I imagine that broken bones and amputations are way more upbeat than brain tumors, brain infections and broken backs. She tells me the people are friendlier, party hardier and use a lot more power tools and hardware. They even have a large-screen, satellite TV that shows NASCAR all day in the OR. The surgeons have nicknames like "Bone Crusher", and they use World Wrestling Federation-style moves when setting or breaking bones. It all sounds like a lot of fun.

Talula is four and has already mastered sarcasm. She can give a sarcastic compliment without cracking much of a smile and has a good sense of what's funny, even if she doesn't fully understand why. As she was eating the chicken and lentil stew with kale I made for us the other day, she kept telling me how much she liked it. In fact she told me that at least 25 times as she ate it very slowly. Each

time was a sweeter and more sincere permutation of, "Daddy, these are the best lentils. You are so sweet to make them for me. You are such a good cook. I especially like the greens. You're so cute, Daddy." I beamed with pride and appreciation, until about the fifth time when I began to get suspicious.

Talula is becoming ambitious as well. She's told us several times that she wants to be a cashier and has drawn pictures of herself holding money. I tell her to work hard in school and keep her head down, and one day she may realize the dream of working in a big-box franchise.

Our next-door neighbors left for Honduras last year, and we inherited one of their two cats, Azriel. The other cat was a timid, high-maintenance, pudgy, mostly indoor cat who they gave to some single woman in her 30s. It's a good thing, as I might have found it a nice home on Central Freeway.

About seven years ago I installed an owl box in the large pecan tree in the backyard. But a couple of years later it became colonized by honey bees, so I put up a second owl box just a few feet from my office balcony. I

can call screech owls to me, and that winter the very evening I got one to come to our house, she moved in. She fledged an owlet then left for the summer. I was very sad to see them go, but I think it's just too hot to live in a box in the summer. She returns every winter, and "my" gray eastern screech owl is back this year, which makes me happy.

erin

Snowy here. Erin moved closer into town, so I get to see her and her cat, Ponce de León, more often. She's still working at the psych hospital ICU and really likes it. Toni loves to hear her work stories, and Erin's thinking about becoming a nurse now.

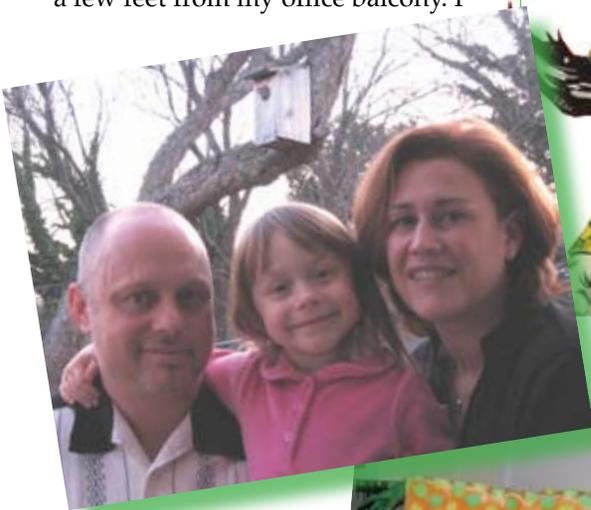
She is NOT, however, thinking of becoming the Horse Whisperer. She signed up for one of UT's "informal" classes to learn horseback riding. The young teacher, who apparently was trained at the prestigious Throw-'Em-In-the-Water Swim Teaching Academy, gave each student a bridle to put on her or his horse.

Erin was a little uneasy about this because a) she had never been close to

a horse, b) her horse was larger than a woolly mammoth, c) her horse was named "Storm" and d) she thought the horse might not want a large piece of metal placed between its teeth.

Erin entered the stall with all the confidence one has approaching a pissed-off grizzly bear. "Nice horsey, I can see you're busy looking around, but maybe you wouldn't mind terribly lowering your head, if it's not too much of an inconvenience, especially since everyone else in this class appears to know what they're doing?" The horse glanced at her as if acknowledging a pesky horsefly, then went about eating some oats. When she crept to within inches of "Storm" and raised the bridle toward his head, he jerked around, slammed the cracked stall door wide open and commenced to race off into the sunset, presumably never to be seen again.

Crimson, humiliated, terrified and bridle drawn tightly to chest, Erin swung around in time to see the horrified teacher with jaw dropped to chest, eyes wide as saucers, yelling something about why in the freakin' bejeezus the stall door was left open. After helping round up the horse, Erin left class without ever sitting upon a horse. "So much for horseback," she said.



Burton, Talula & Melissa, with Burton's owl peeking out from her box on the pecan tree in their backyard, a few feet above their office balcony.



Erin with Ponce de León (Pouncy) on her favorite holiday, Hallowe'en.



Erin's lizard costume went awry, so she became a bird.



Celebrating 29th wedding anniversary at Uchi, Japanese restaurant. All smiles, just before the bill arrived.

John

John's a second-year senior at Texas A&M and is due to graduate in May with a BA degree in ... History and Philosophy. He stays in Austin with us in the summers, and he pets and plays with me a lot. He takes me on walks, too.

This past summer he got a job as a bouncer at Fadó, a downtown Irish pub. He says he's learned a lot about the relationship between the Irish and alcohol. He says mostly they get happy and jolly, but at some point, some of them get a little crazy.

One night a girl about his age got a little crazy, and the manager ordered her to leave. Refusing, she charged up the stairs, and John had no choice but to physically stop her. Over her shoulder John could see the girl's brother who looked genuinely terrified, yelling at John, "Don't touch her, man!! She'll go off on you!!"

The next thing John knew she was spitting in his face and sucker-



Talula with (uncle) John.

punched him in the stomach hard enough to nearly take him out. Afterwards her brother effusively apologized, and the next night she brought him the syrupy-sweetest card apologizing profusely; it even had drawings of Godzilla on it. John says he's developed new insights into The Drink.

Mom's friends tell her the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. John drives a shuttle bus at A&M to help with expenses. [Remember, Toni and Ian met while driving shuttle buses at UT in 1974.] Toni and Ian say the

A&M buses sound like the buses they used to drive. This week John noticed in his side mirror a wobbly rear tire. When he got out to check it out, he found only three lug nuts attaching the wheel (rather than 10). He likes the job anyway and plays Mozart while he drives.

Here's hoping we can honour the spirit of the holidays in our hearts, and keep it all the year.

Love,
The Inglises



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P.S. Don't forget to recycle your holiday cards by sending the fronts to

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