

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 2011** in our hearts, we think fondly of friends like you and the personality traits you possess that qualify you to receive the alternative Inglis newsletter – **The Greatest Gift of All.**



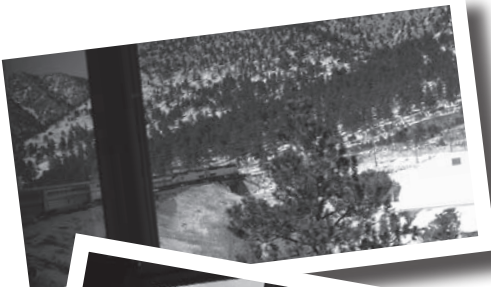
Toni's in heaven

Train Trip

In Christmas letters, nothing is more irritating than when people drone on and on about their freakin' fabulous vacations.

Ian and I took the most fabulous vacation ever this year. We rode Amtrak to Chicago, had some fun there, then the Zephyr route to San Francisco.

Gently ascending then descending through the Rockies – I never knew anything could be so beautiful. The train clickety-clacked through miles of snow-covered mountains, hills, valleys, red sandstone cliffs, partially frozen steamy mountain streams with fishermen, valleys, bald eagles and snow-topped Christmas trees of every type and color.



Not to mention the cozy sleeper car with its own porter, three yummy meals a day in the elegant diner car (included) and, of course, our beloved (carry-on) India Pale Ale.

Forty-five hours of relaxation and spectacular views from your room, lounge car, everywhere. Most of the time you get lucky with the lounge car, but occasionally you're subjected to ... distraction.

Two down-on-their-luck men parked themselves in the lounge car. On and on and on, they serenaded increasingly agitated passengers with loud guitar playing and singing splashed with tales of drunken-



Ian in lounge car

ness — all of which sounded like fingernails on a blackboard. Fortunately, the conductor invited the musicians to cease and desist before an angry mob formed.

A shady-looking young man who kept a low profile was a loose associate of theirs. He kind of messed up, though, when he flashed \$5,000 in green when upgrading from coach to sleeper car, prompting the Amtrak folks to alert the police. Next stop, three narcs boarded and pretty much shook the guy down. Fortunately for him, no arrest and, no seizure of cash.

You just can't get stuff like this on an airplane or a car. And you don't have to go through security to board Amtrak!

Employment

The trip gave us a chance to do something we haven't done in years. **Converse!!**

I coaxed out of Ian the trajectory of his epic rise from door-to-door egg-boy to defending criminals. He



lost the egg job when the A&M poultry farm raised its prices from 40 to 50 cents/dozen and his customers refused to pay.

[Can you imagine how wonderful (and quaint) to have eggs delivered to your door? *By Precious?*]

Not ready to lose a worker of his immense talent, they promoted Ian to debeaking chickens and cleaning under their enclosures, i.e., shoveling chicken shit. To this day he thinks of them as the stinkiest and most disgusting creatures alive.

From there he moved onto lifeguard, carpenter, highway construction worker, house tearer-downer, truck driver, dishwasher, mover, bus driver, then lawyer extraordinaire.

I always thought how wonderful it was to have a nurse in the family. But in the end, it's far greater to have a criminal defense lawyer in the family.

I'm still full-time at Seton working shifts in neonatal and writing the hospital system's *NursingNews*. Ian wants me to work until I drop dead on the street.

I'm still a regular opinion contributor for the *Austin American-Statesman* (my favorite job). Do you know anything about the complex U.S. health care system? Neither do I, but it doesn't stop me from writing about it authoritatively. My column is commonly known as

"Agree with Toni, and no one gets hurt."

In sad news, this year my compensation per column was cut in half. I used to be able to buy a fairly classy meal with it. Now I can buy, maybe three six-packs.

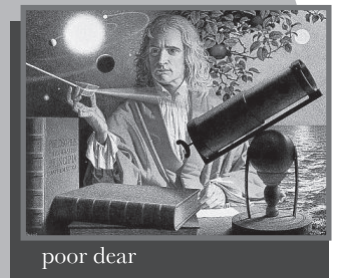
But that's okay. I understand. Hard times have descended upon newspapers. Consultants are hired to explain to executives that they need to appeal to young people. So, they add celebrity blurbs (the Lindsay Lohan page), get rid of so many pesky words and that boring stuff like news of the world.

They add more graphics and make the page smaller and thinner, so that now it reads like a cross between the esteemed British tabloid *News of the World* and a comic book, thus pissing off older people who actually read the paper. And still young people wouldn't pick up a newspaper if their lives depended on it.

It would appear that newspaper executives are morons, except of course for the brilliant ones who decided to pay me.

The Laws of Gravity, etc.

I turned 65 this year. Seems like only yesterday I passed the age to legally drink, and here I am old enough for Medicare.



On my birthday, I took a good long look in the mirror and fell into a morbid depression. I felt so bad for Sir Isaac Newton. The man spent most of his life doing math and other boring stuff to prove to the world his Law of Relative Gravitation. Poor guy. All he had to do was show folks a picture of his mother.

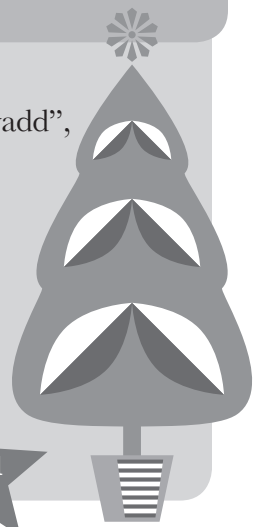
But what the hell. I ran to the refrigerator, rubbed mayonnaise all through my hair and frolicked about the condo singing, "I feel pretty! Oh, so pretty! I feel pretty and witty and gay!!!!!!!"

Social Media

This year Ian began Tweeting to his devoted fans, both of them. He picked the username "ddwadd", a knockoff of diddy-wa-diddy. Here's a sampling (in the off-chance you missed them):

- "Why would anyone own a dog that's smaller than a cat? Just seems wrong."
- "I march to the beat of a different drummer, one who pounds a five-gallon water bottle with a beer bone."
- "20-inch wheels? On a bike, maybe. But a truck or a car? Grow up, man."
- "Technology may be irritating, but at least in the digital world there are no paper cuts."
- "If you see a tree with a smooth green trunk, cut it down. It's just a big weed."
- "Wouldn't it suck if suddenly hot water came out of the cold-water faucet?"

2011



Applause and How To Dress

Nothing is more nauseating in Christmas letters than people bragging about their freakin' awards and the

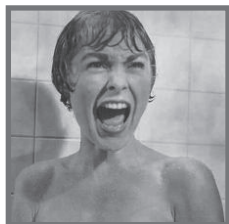


grandiose achievements of their freakin' offspring.

With 5,000 applicants, John was one of 80 hired by the Austin Fire Department. I apologize. I couldn't hold that one back.

In other news, I was inducted into the American Academy of Nursing — in Washington, DC no less. Floating on Cloud 9 turned abruptly to horror when I was told the event was Black Tie and I would need to wear a long evening gown.

The only dress in my closet was from the LLBean catalog, 12 years old and worn twice.



Keep in mind that my epic rise to stardom began as inauspiciously as Ian's. Dressed in my beloved overalls, I drove a 40-foot shuttle bus and sold sandwiches on the Drag. Of course, I have upgraded to scrubs, except when I write I wear pajamas.

Panicked, I rushed to the rich ladies' Goodwill and purchased a fire-engine red long dress, even though that color went out years ago. FOR \$16!!!!

It was too long, so I bought silver glittery heels that felt like tightly wrapped torture devices. But hey, I would only wear them for a short time.

I hadn't put on makeup in 33 years, so I nervously decided to have it "professionally" applied at Macy's. Just this side of a panic attack, I told the lady I was going to a fancy event and that I wished to avoid the cadaver look. Sternly, she told me to relax and close my eyes.

After what seemed like hours, she told me all proudly to open my eyes, and I saw this, only with colors reversed: →



I started to tell her I actually preferred the cadaver to the mutant raccoon look, but I didn't because a) she looked like she was going to kill me and b) I had taken the sensible precaution of not allowing enough time, and the event was about to begin.

Near hysteria, I called my son Burton. He would reassure me. And he didn't fail. "I regret how quick we are to besmirch the wild beauty of the noble raccoon," he said. "Your beautician was clearly a typist in her previous employment and merely yearned to white out and then type over the errors on your face. Except she did only one line ... Poor woman, these things are delicate after all. It was a brave start anyway."

After multiple glasses of champagne, the event actually went well. (continued on next page)



cleaned up



There was dancing, where Ian learned something besides reggae.

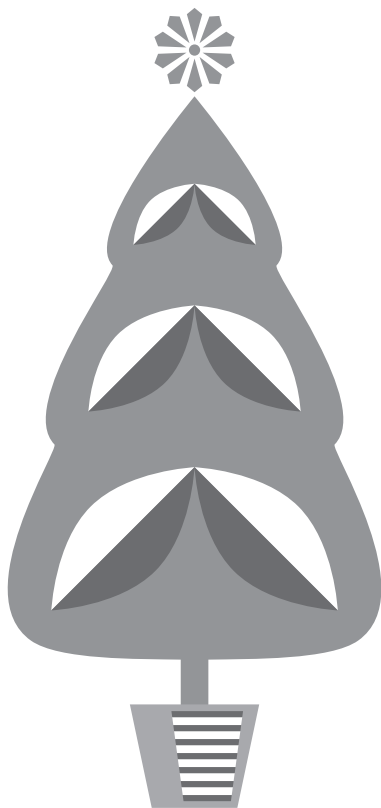
I texted Burton the photo at right. "It's always good to see Ian shake his funky white ass with his adopted people," he replied. "To the outsider, he probably comes across as a stiff cracker off his crutches. But with his earnest envy of those with rhythm, he always manages to dance his way into their hearts.

"I swear I saw him do this at a reggae fest a couple of years ago and just as I was about to run away in shame, a young, black Rastafarian walked by and shouted, 'That's exactly how you do it!' That's when I realized how stoned everyone was."

I have run out of room. Erin and John are fine. Burton and his daughter Talula are, too. They all send heartfelt greetings of the season.



Ian learning something besides reggae



Here's wishing you a 2012 full of clickey-clack, diddy-wa-diddy, empathy, champagne, newspapers, glitter, mayonnaise, reggae, Goodwill and lots of applause.



*Love,
The Inglises*

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