

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

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

Christmas, 1993



Greetings, friends and relatives. We hope you're feeling the Christmas spirit by the time this letter finds you.

We're all fine. Ian is just the same, only a little grayer (it's nice to have company). He's still practicing criminal defense law, and he's still into rockclimbing. In fact this fall he took a Boy Scout troop to Enchanted Rock for lessons. This year he's heading up a coalition of neighborhoods to convince the local government to construct a noise abatement barrier along a major highway that was built through the heart of the city some years back. It's an ambitious undertaking, but if anyone can do it Ian can (visions of Hillary), and it would certainly improve the quality of life for those of us living along its edges.

I am still working weekends at the Regional Neonatal Center, but after 13 years I feel a change of direction coming on.... Meanwhile, after the Health Policy Fellowship I completed this year, I'm enjoying my position as Director of Governmental Affairs for the District Texas Nurses Association. (Ian refers to this as my non-income-producing activity, which brings to mind Dave Barry's definition of "spouse": teeming flaw colony.) I expect that health-care reform will see an expanded role for nurse practitioners to deliver primary care (what people usually see a generalist physician for). I've had some fun and success writing about this issue, with publication in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*. Whoa!

Burton's conspicuous absence from the Christmas picture is testament to the difficulty in getting 5 busy people in the same place at the same time! But, rest assured, he's absolutely fine and as wonderful as ever. He's still a gourmet cook, a skill he did *not* learn at home, and is still working toward his degree in Horticulture from Texas A&M. To pay for college, he still works as a TV and film grip during summers and recesses, which is where he met his love, Jenny Dempsey--better known as Baby Bop on *Barney and Friends*. Actually, she used to be Baby Bop; now she's BJ.

Erin is fine and loves the 9th grade. She attends the magnet Science Academy, and was recently chosen by the faculty to be their "poster child" for recruitment purposes. She still has a fondness for loud music, some of which appears to have been recorded live in hell.

John is fine. He's enjoying (most of) the 4th grade, and he still loves baseball. Every morning as I lie in bed feigning sleep, I hear John and Ian discussing sports over breakfast. (Erin's already on the bus riding to her school, which is somewhere south of Canada). It continues to amaze me how two persons, presumably of sound mind, can discuss scores, injuries, plays, etcetera, for more than 2 minutes. I must accept the conclusion which Einstein arrived at late in life--there are certain things the human mind cannot grasp.

Before closing, this year I will break with tradition and discuss the family dog, Sunny; after all, she has been with us longer than Erin. She, too, is baffling to me. Now I am convinced that she is both blind and deaf, yet every day she manages to sense the presence of her arch enemy: the US Postal Service. Her *raison d'être* is to communicate "bark" to this dreaded foe, and on a daily basis she bounds from room to room reverberating this message from wall to wall in splendorous echo. If Pet Owner Irritation were an Olympic event, she would be a gold medalist.

Here's hoping you get everything you want for Christmas: world peace, cures for horrific diseases, places for everyone to live, health care for all, spiritual peace for each one of us, clean air and water, spare time, and maybe just a few little trinkets.

Love,

Toni & Ian