

# "IT'S BEGINNING TO FEEL A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS."

Sung this year, 1994, through clenched teeth.

**WARNING:** Ex-Surgeon General Elders warns that this Christmas note may not be suitable for young readers—at least until kindergarten.

The stress of 1994 has resulted in the production of two Inglis Christmas letters: a general version and this alternative version, which you have been selected to receive because of certain personality traits which you possess. You're not missing much; the general note basically read, "Merry Christmas. We're all fine and wonderful, and we hope you are too, whatever your name is."

## SUNNY

Recall in last year's Christmas letter a reference to the family dog, Sunny, who is so old that in her younger years she once boarded in the same kennel with the original Rin Tin Tin. We think she is both blind and deaf, hence Ian's reference to her as "the Helen Keller of dogs". The big news this year is, *Sunny Lives!* Yes, after a severe stroke in March, renowned veterinarian Dr. Rusty Toth gave her a simple intravenous steroid infusion which left her friskier than ever. Ian, who has been lobbying for a cat for many years, became greatly frustrated by this episode, and he suggested we change doctors—to a Dr. Kevorkian I believe.

## IAN

Speaking of Ian, he is still practicing criminal defense law. He loves his work so much that he gets through the day by dreaming of early retirement when he will start a rockclimbing business whereby he would take rock-climber wannabes on an instructional trip to Enchanted Rock. *City Slickers*—on a rock. Ha! Ha! But he's very serious about this.

In other Ian news, this year he became head coach of John's team in the fall instructional baseball league. Ian and John say, "It's not competitive; you just go out there and have fun." Ha! But they are quick to point out that their team was 9-1-3. I have no idea what the numbers mean, but I have discovered that if I switch them around while telling people of their season, I can cause Ian and John great distress, which has been an important source of entertainment for me this year. Ian was invited to be a Major League head coach for this coming spring. So, in summary, this year Ian is fine, except for some major back surgery he had in July.

You would think that Ian would buck up and put up with a slightly herniated disc. BUT NO! He made the purely selfish decision to have it surgically repaired. Can you imagine? I mean *who* exactly did he think was going to take over his domestic responsi-

bilities, such as rescuing dinner? At least he had the foresight to schedule surgery for the summer when Erin and John could be imposed upon for caretaking.

I remember well the day of his surgery. Ian and the surgeon could have cared less that I had a written report due the next day to the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department concerning an external grant review for HIV/AIDS services (an example of what Ian refers to as my nonincome-producing activities). I had brought the computer to his hospital room and was working away, trying to concentrate despite the obvious distraction.

**Ian** (a few hours post-op): "Toni, would you mind terribly bringing me a few ice chips?"

**Inner thought:** "I hope that 20 years of being Toni's slave and emotional rock will pay off for me now that I really do need her. After all, she's a great nurse."

**Toni:** [Silence. Uninterrupted clacking of computer keyboard.]

**Ian** (softly): "Toni?"

**Toni** (irritated): "Although I do not wish to be rude, can you not see that I am working here? Why do you think God invented the call button? Call a real nurse!"

**Inner thought:** "That was really inappropriate; God did not invent the call button. Besides, there is no God."

## TONI

My main jobs this year have been to serve as seeing-eye person for the family dog, to care for Ian when absolutely unavoidable, to take on Ian's domestic responsibilities as well as my own, to write about things in health care I think need fixing, and finally to continue to practice neonatal nursing (which serves as paycheck and reality check). This year I was appointed by the City Council to serve on a Task Force to evaluate options for our public hospital, the future of which is uncertain thanks to the free market takeover of health care. (I referred to it in a recent column

as "unfettered capitalism". Ha!) In addition, I was appointed by the Mayor to serve on a 5-county HIV/AIDS Planning Council, the charge of which is to oversee the distribution of all public moneys including Ryan White federal dollars. Some of these activities have been rewarding and fulfilling, some not.

I mentioned in last year's letter great hope for fundamental health care reform, hopefully with a strong role for nurse practitioners. But alas, hundreds of millions of dollars were spent by groups that were very concerned that "health care reform" might be interpreted to mean reform of health care (which of course would spell the end of American medical care as we know it). Consequently, as alert humor



## FAMILY VACATION

This year the family vacationed for a month in a Swiss chalet complete with chef and a handsome, young, muscular masseur. Ha! Ha! Just kidding. Actually, our summer vacation consisted of one day spent in Wimberley, Texas.

Backgrounder: for the first time ever, this summer I actually had a *paying* writing job. I had secretly planned how I was going to use this money to treat the family to a vacation in Mexico, say Cozumel, to snorkel and swim in turquoise water, snow-white beaches, etc. I could hardly wait to tell Ian, Erin, and John about it. I was so excited I could barely talk.

After hearing my plan, they gently informed me that I was a fool. They explained, with the tone of voice one uses when talking to an obvious cretin, that it would be much more cost-effective to simply burn my money. Thus inspired, I instead planned a trip to Wimberley with our neighbor who owns a cabin on the pristine waters of Cypress Creek.

I realized too late that Ian was just one month post-op, so that of necessity I would have to do all the work: food preparation, packing, carrying items to and from the cabin, etc. After 2 days of preparation, we made it to Wimberley where we spent less than 24 hours, after which I then spent another 2 days unpacking, etc. But, it was worth it because I actually had (and this is the truth) a whole hour and a half to myself of pure relaxation wherein I floated face down on an air mattress looking at the underwater wonders of Cypress Creek: turtles, small fish, a variety of underwater plants, and of course the traditional rusting Texas beer cans. In that hour and a half, there were no phones, no faxes, no problems.

But I paid for that hour and a half. Later that day I joined my family and several visitors around Jacob's Well, a popular nearby attraction where at least 13 divers have died trying to get to the bottom. One of the locals who had consumed large quantities of Lone Star (a Texas beer which tastes like rat saliva) exclaimed for all to hear, "Good God, lady, what happened to your bá-yuk?!" (In rural Texas "back" is a two-syllable word.) "I guess I got a little sun-burned," I explained in hushed tones. Thus inspired, after gales of raucous laughter he exclaimed, "Dáyum!" (That's Wimberley-speak for "damn".) I then told him I thought I'd seen him about 20 years ago playing a banjo on a front porch in the Appalachians in the movie *Deliverance*. He tilted his head to the side and said, "Huh?"

## MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

I myself am shooting for a little less stress in 1995. And really, even with all life's tensions, I look at the family picture and realize that I'm a part of something important, something special, something that I hope some day can be controlled by medication.

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.

columnist Dave Barry noted, Congress whittled Clinton's 1,300-page National Health Care Plan down to a one-paragraph nonbinding resolution urging everyone to floss; this resolution would not take effect until the year 2006 and at this writing is still opposed by Bob Dole.

The elections certainly were uninspiring. Losing the divine Ann Richards to that young Shrub *really* stung. The one positive aspect is that the high visibility of the likes of Newt "Mr. Nice-Guy" Gingrich is inspiring political humorists to new heights of literary achievement, such as Molly Ivins who keeps saying, "Orphanages! Workhouses! Hire temps for Congress!" Well, I, for one, am not going to sit idly by and do nothing. No, sir. I'm taking the sensible precaution of developing a nervous facial tic.

## BURTON

Burton is fine. He is scheduled to graduate from Texas A&M with a Horticulture degree in May, just shy of his 26th birthday. What's the rush? He's paying for it! He's worked his way through college as a grip on films, commercials, etc., and by trimming, or as he says, "sculpting" trees. It must be exciting to watch one's firstborn swing on a rope 50 feet in the air with no health insurance, but I wouldn't know.

## ERIN

Erin is fine. She's a sophomore at the LBJ magnet Science Academy and is busily working toward becoming what her mother wants her to be: the first nun president of the United States. Or possibly not. The big news this year is that we have had several meaningful conversations. She has braces, you see, and being only 15, she has had to be driven to her appointments. Thus trapped in the car together, we were actually forced to communicate on a verbal level. Next year she will become 16 and get her drivers license. That is when Ian and I turn to heroin. Just kidding. Of course.

Actually, the truth is, Erin is extremely sensible and level-headed. She's a straight-A student, is reasoning out the most suitable college to attend, works part-time at a pizza place and models for portrait drawing classes so she can buy a car at age 16 (oh God), and is applying to work as an intern in the Congress next year. I even like some of her music this year!

## JOHN

John is minimally inspired by 5th grade, but at least he sees the utility in completing assigned tasks. (Past experience with a certain unnamed brother renders us eternally grateful for this.) He gets through the day by fantasizing about plays on the baseball or football field. He and Ian were collectively unamused by the baseball strike this year. At 10, he is still huggable and has not yet discovered the joys of music recorded live in hell played at a volume equal to that blasted at the Branch Davidian compound by the federal Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Agency. Whoever dreamed up that torture technique obviously had teenagers. If the ATF had allowed 13 year olds to make their musical selections, there might have been a different outcome.

Toni, Ian  
& Family