

I WILL HONOUR CHRISTMAS IN MY HEART, AND TRY TO KEEP IT ALL THE YEAR.

Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol

Once again this year, **1995**, you have been selected, because of certain personality traits which you possess, to receive the alternative Inglis Christmas letter.

SUNNY

Until October 14th I thought I was going to begin another Inglis Christmas letter with the usual, *Sunny Lives!* But, on that date Sunny departed this world because she could no longer live life in the manner to which she had become accustomed. And, borrowing from *Forrest Gump*, that's all I have to say about that.

KITTY COW-COW

I have often wondered what kind of idiot, middle-aged, pathetic parent would be stupid enough to "inherit" a pet from a child. Have they no backbone? Can they not simply say "no" to children who are too irresponsible to raise the pets they acquire?

We inherited Burton's cat this year. John's holding him in the picture. Actually, we all adore him, and in fact Erin and John fight over him every night at bedtime. Naturally, we'll give the cat back to Burton when he settles down, that is if the cat has not died of old age.

IAN

This may surprise many of you who have known Ian over the years, but, sadly, I must report that now he reads mainly the sports and automotive sections of the daily newspaper. When I related this to the medical director at work (who is Ian's age and a Harvard graduate), he responded with genuine awe and admiration: "Oh, now *that's* advanced." I find this attitude stunningly irresponsible, but I've decided it must be a middle-aged guy thing.

The man I fell in love with knew the news even before it happened. I, on the other hand, did not pick up a newspaper until 1989.

I have formulated a theorem about this disturbing phenomenon as the true nature of spousal relationships: humans are genetically programmed to become incapable of communicating with one another shortly after the wedding. That's what I tell myself when I intellectualize all this, but in my heart I know it's that broken male chromosome.

Once again this year Ian head-coached John's team in the fall instructional baseball league. It was not a memorable season. In fact, his players used to fight over who got to be benched. But nonetheless they did manage to make it to the semi-finals when, sadly, they were soundly defeated by youngsters from the Texas School for the Blind. That last statement is a lie; please disregard.



But seriously, Ian is still practicing criminal defense law and is very involved in community activities such as the current project to keep developers from buying an historic military installation in the center of town, Camp Mabry.

TONI

I am fine, except I must say that I am not particularly enamored with this growing older thing. Frequently this past year family members have heard my Faye Wray (think King Kong here) scream coming from the shower followed by, "THIS IS NOT MY BODY!! THIS IS THE BODY OF PRE-LIPOSUCTION ROSEANNE!!"

I am still practicing neonatal nursing (which serves as a paycheck and reality check). And, thanks to the Republican Inquisition at work dismantling LBJ's social programs, I've been working overtime (with many others) to assure that vulnerable populations can still have certain niceties, like health care.

After reading last year's Christmas letter, the head of planning and marketing for the hospital where I work asked me to write, for no pay, a humor column on health care finance for the Network news. I pointed out to the good man that humor and health care finance are an oxymoron, laughed in his face, and flatly refused.

Actually I have enjoyed writing the column. My own personal favorite was the one on the HMO industry investing millions of its excess dollars in the tobacco industry (a true story).

The big news this year is that Ian is able to utter the phrase "another one of Toni's nonincome-producing activities" with almost no detectable contempt in his voice.

BURTON

Big news here. By earning a degree in Horticulture from Texas A&M University in May, Burton acquired hard proof that he has in fact broadened his intellectual horizons. For you naysayers, a certain

conversation I had with Burton involving the microwaving of cockroaches will make you a believer. Shortly after graduation we were warming up a food substitute for lunch. Listen:

Toni (thinking out loud and not expecting an answer): "How do you figure microwave ovens work?"

Burton (glibly): "Well, you see, specific wavelengths that scientists classify as microwaves are generated, and they scatter randomly. If these wavelengths crash into something large enough, they excite the object's water molecules to spin, producing heat as kinetic energy. If the object in the oven is smaller than the microwaves, it is not effected - like cockroaches, for example."

Toni (dreading the answer): "How do you know?"

Now keep in mind here that this is the university that is famous for a certain ROTC sergeant who attracted national attention by biting off the head of a chicken to prove a point to his young Aggie disciples.

Burton: "We tried it in genetics class. The little devils ran around in there as if nothing were happening for as long as we'd 'wave 'em."

Stunned and speechless, I didn't know whether a) to call 911, CNN, or animal rights groups, or b) to simply drop to my knees and thank God that Burton had paid for his own education.

But seriously, Burton is still doing his tree "sculpting" and working as a grip on film sets in both Austin and Dallas.

ERIN

Erin is fine, although actually I haven't seen much of her since her 16th birthday in August when she got her license and bought a car - yes, the one she's been saving for since she was 14. I'm pretty sure she still lives with us because her room gets messy, the grocery bill is high, and we keep finding 17-inch blonde hairs around.

Actually, Erin, is doing great. If you cannot tolerate parents blatantly and shamelessly bragging about their children, then do not read the rest of this section; skip down to "JOHN". Erin's a junior at the magnet LBJ Science Academy and makes in the high As on her report cards. She works on Saturdays and saves money by taking the bus to school. She was one of ten LBJ students recruited to do research at the University. She chose entomology.

She was also selected this year to be a member of *Teen Life*, which is an interactive theater group sponsored by Planned Parenthood. They practice five hours per week and perform at schools, community functions, and churches. The performances are based on teen issues such as violence, drugs, relationships, sex, etc. We attended the Première Performance, which was awesome. That was our daughter up there on that stage, but not our little girl.

JOHN

John likes school better this year now that he's a 6th grader in (ominous organ music heard here) middle school. The school is pretty safe except for a drive-by shooting last year. But Ian and I are not worried because John has gotten really good at watching his back and has learned to run really fast. And who says you don't learn anything in the public schools?

He still loves baseball, and in fact has turned out to be quite a pitcher. Ian still gets John up in the morning. For many years John's day has begun by talking sports with Ian. Listen:

Ian (7:15 am): "John - time to get up."

John (appears to be lying in state, except for the dried saliva on his chin): "Zzzzzzz."

Ian (confident and not discouraged): "Guess who won the 49ers game?"

John (eyes closed, slight lip movement): "Xzeembbs..."

Ian (encouraged): "The Carolina Panthers! As if! And they played IN San Francisco!"

John (eyes open halfway, no other body movement): "No...way..."

Ian (thrilled to almost have someone to talk to about something of national importance): "Way!"

John (sleepy, but getting up and walking into

the kitchen while leaning on Ian): "Jeez, you're kidding. What was the score?...7 to 13?!"

And this is how it all begins. Which brings to mind Dave Barry's cure for the forgetfulness we all face as we approach middle age. He suggests we undergo brain surgery to drain out all the useless trivia we've stored up over a lifetime. (I'm game.) He cautions, however, that for middle-aged men it is necessary to prepare for the high-pressure explosion resulting from tightly-packed sports trivia.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Notice the family photo wherein we are all attempting to look natural and not pissed off even though we are sitting in front of a fire that we built just for this picture even though it was 77 degrees outside, and everyone (except John) is dutifully following my instructions to "Smile! Damn it!" even though our backsides are roasting.

Note the limestone fireplace and hearth. They're new. Why? Because the previous owners of this house had the intelligence and foresight to build a brick fireplace right on top of the slab foundation, which eventually broke away.

Hawkeye Ian keenly observed that one side of the living room was falling off into Johnson Creek, and, in true Ian style, fixed the problem by having 16 15-foot piers of solid concrete poured under the living room, at the approximate cost of a stealth bomber. As they raised that side of the living room 4 1/2 inches, the fireplace bricks popped out. Sounded like popcorn popping, or money burning (think the movie *The Money Pit* here).

Unamused, I informed Ian, who was content to stop after The Great Concrete Pour, that since our living room would now meet nuclear power plant specs, we might as well make it nice. So, at the approximate cost of yet another stealth bomber, we got new paint, fireplace, floor, furniture, and a clerestory.

We moved our stuff out of the living room in April, confident that we would return to normalcy in 4 weeks. Six months later in October we moved our stuff back in after a garage sale wherein we came face to face with clothes we hadn't worn in 30 years and college class notebooks. Mine droned on and on about useful things like Spanish syntax, Ian's about the meaning of truth and symbolic logic.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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, clean air and water, spare time, and maybe just a few little trinkets.

Toni, Ian
&
Family