

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

Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol

As I honour Christmas **1996** in my heart, I think about friends like you and the personality traits which you possess that qualify you once again this year to receive the alternative Inglis newsletter.

SNOWY

Meet Snowy - "the Wonder Dog" (as her Uncle Charles calls her). Recall from last year's letter that Snowy's predecessor, Suriny, left this world after 16 years, the last 10 of which were marked by the occasional, violent outburst from Ian: "WE'RE NEVER GETTING ANOTHER DOG!!"

This year we got another dog. Ian and John (and Erin) were backpacking this summer in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado when they saw a border collie at work herding sheep. The rest is history.

John fell into a funk just before his 12th birthday, despondent and unable to mutter anything for a week except, "I want a puppy." On his birthday, we answered an ad in the paper: "Border Collie Puppies". We called and happily discovered this guy had 100% purebred border collie pups for just \$100!

We met the nice, one-armed man with several teeth missing in the parking lot under the HEB sign in a nearby small town. We picked the female, paid the \$100, and happily drove home.

The next day at work I was bragging about our shrewd investment of the \$100, 100% purebred:

Lisa (fellow nurse): "Snowy? What's her paper name?"

Toni (beginning to feel uncomfortable): "Paper name?"

Lisa (looking as though she were preparing to explain a complex mathematical concept to an oyster): "Toni, you *do* have papers, don't you? No? Well, then, the parents were present, right? No?"

Janna (another smarty pants nurse): "Uh, Toni, I raise border collies, and I'm not particularly encouraged that the dog's name is Snowy."

Toni (stunned silence, looking confused) ...

At this point everyone in the room - mothers of premature babies, doctor, respiratory therapist, nurses - all were doubled over in one long, drawn-out exhale of uncontrollable laughter.

Lisa (finally able to draw breath, eeked out): "Toni, we can understand YOU doing this, but WHERE WAS IAN??!!"

Toni (humiliation turning to spousal rage): "He. Was. THERE!!"

Later that evening ...

Toni (controlled): "Oh, Ian, by the way, did you happen to get the dog's papers from the nice one-armed gentleman with missing teeth?"

Ian: "Toni, I really didn't care if the dog was purebred. I was tired, didn't want to look anymore, and it was obviously a wonderful dog."

I couldn't argue with that last part, and anyway it probably wasn't worth going to jail over.

KITTY COW-COW

Kitty Cow-Cow objected to taking the Christmas picture and protested by staring moronically at Burton's boots. It's been an interesting year for the

cat. When Snowy first arrived, he was interested. Now he's trying to cope with life as a sheep. That is to say, the cat cannot take two steps within sight of Snowy without being herded, and he is not amused.

What must seem equally odd to the cat is the nightly ritual in which he sleeps with both Erin and John. Whoever goes to bed first gets the cat. When asleep, the other one creeps into the other's room and stealthily retrieves him for her/himself - much like the Grinch stealing candy canes from the angelic little sleeping Who's in Whoville.

IAN

This year is marked by my telling Ian Not a slave to fashion Inglis that no, he cannot wear that outside of the house.

One of 1996's New Year's resolutions was that I would cease doing what little clothes shopping I ever did for Ian. Last summer he announced he was going off to REI to buy a pair of shorts.

As I watched him pull out of the driveway, feelings of exuberance in my newfound freedom and yes, confidence that he would return home with a tasteful pair of British walking shorts - were surpassed only by the horror of seeing his new purchase, proudly displayed.

He stood before me wearing the new shorts, an old t-shirt that was just a touch too small, dark socks, and tennis shoes purchased in 1982.

Recall here that the man is 6'4", so that knee-length shorts on him appear to be the size of a small refrigerator. They were knit with wide, highly contrasting horizontal stripes of maroon and beige. Ian said he found them on the sale rack. Small wonder, a clown would refuse to wear them on the grounds that they were undignified.

Other than that, Ian's fine. Once again this year he coached John's Little League Majors baseball team. Overall the season went very well except for finishing with a nine-game losing streak, at which point John announced that he would never pitch again.

The highlight of Ian's year was a two-week train trip via Amtrak this summer to the east coast with Erin. They went from here to Chicago to Boston to New York and back down to New Orleans,

where John and I met them. Then a car trip back to Austin that was so hideous that it resulted in a sacred family pact to never, ever mention the words: "Aunt Bea's cajun red beans and rice".

Ian loved the steady, mesmerizing clacking over the tracks and the easy-going atmosphere of the train. He said no one was in a hurry - no laptops, modems, phones, faxes - just nice people relaxing and reading. More under "GRIN".

Ian's still practicing criminal defense law and involved in select community activities, and darn good at it, if I do say.

TONI

The highlight of the year was meeting with Hillary Rodham Clinton. Believe me when I say to you that she is just as wonderful and lovely in person as she



appears publicly.

We were both born during the Truman administration, but when I saw the color picture of the two of us, it looked to me like she was shaking hands with her grandmother! But do you think that I, who came of age during women's liberation, would allow myself to be bothered by that? Or that I would be constrained by outdated notions of what beauty is? Even in the remote possibility that I would, do you seriously think that I would resort to a shallow and irresponsible act of making a purely cosmetic change?

This year I colored my hair. It's now "a mystery color", in the words of the woman who gasped after washing out the tint. This woman came highly recommended to me by an acquaintance explaining that she worked out of her home because she was between jobs, and not to worry because she had worked in Beverly Hills. I was thinking California. Wrong. She was thinking the Beverly Hills that's a suburb of Waco, Texas: population 342. But it's okay, my hair color



has served as an important and relatively harmless source of entertainment for my coworkers at the hospital on their eternal quest of the Holy Grail: a good laugh.

The big news this year is that the Daughters of Charity Healthcare Network where I work has allowed me to substitute some clinical hours in neonatal ICU with writing/editing (from home), which I really love. I'm still involved in various community activities, like the Ryan White HIV Planning Council.

BURTON

Burton moved to McKinney, a suburb north of Dallas. He moved onto five acres with his dog and his chickens, and, you know, he does have a thing for chickens. (And I was ever so much hoping he'd have stuck with the same species!)

He still does occasional film work, but his heart is in his tree service business: "Lone Star Arboriculture". When he works, he puts a metal sign with his company name on it in the yard. Only problem is, no one knows what it is. The other day a guy got him down out of the trees: "Hey, bubba, I saw yer sign. How much you want fer yer house?"

One of the highlights of Burton's year was a trip the two of us took to Puerto Vallarta - an old town on the Pacific coast of Mexico with cobblestone streets and atmosphere inconceivably rich in culture and beauty. Burton is the quintessential naturalist, and when we were snorkeling, he was truly in his element.

He dug sea urchins out of crevices, discovered and held up countless varieties of starfish for me to examine, and chased and harassed blowfish to get them to puff up (I could relate to these fish). At one point underwater we encountered a party of about six divers who found Burton in action to be far more entertaining than the exotic marine life.

ERIN

Erin's surviving her senior year. With school, work, theatre, volunteer work, and applications for college and scholarships (essays, essays, and more essays), it's pretty stressful.

One of the highlights of her year (and her last hurrah at home) was the train trip this summer with Ian. Ian said Erin slept 12 hours a day; Erin said Ian ate 12 hours a day. Either one sounds great to me.

On the trip, Erin interviewed at the University of Chicago. She really loved it and wanted to cancel her interview at Barnard College. But Ian said, "No way - the interview's already set up."

So, they went to Manhattan and she interviewed at Barnard, the sister school to Columbia. She really fell in love with the school. The student-teacher ratio is 12-to-one; nearly 20 percent of their graduating class goes on to medical school (which she plans to do); IT'S IN NEW YORK!; it has a fabulous dance program; and it boasts such distinguished alumna as Anna Quindlen, Martha Stewart, and Margaret Mead.

She decided to put all her eggs in one basket and apply only there for early admission. Acceptance notices were mailed December 15th (the reason this newsletter is so late). And the big news this year is ... [drumroll] ... ERIN WAS ACCEPTED!!

Only hitch is, they've got to offer us a financial deal better than the equivalent of roundtrip airfare during peak season to Sydney - PER MONTH! We're setting up the Erin Inglis College Fund and invite you to donate. Just kidding. Of course.

Actually I think Ian has a plan to use what we would have contributed toward retirement toward the cost. I've told Erin to not feel guilty about the fact that her father and I will be eating cat food in our old age, that with any luck we can afford the canned.

JOHN

The highlight of John's year was getting Snowy, who he named after TinTin's faithful, smart, and beloved dog from the wonderful Hergé books. John's taken her to puppy classes, and the dog actually obeys John.

John is enjoying his first year (7th grade) at the Math, Science, and Computer Technology Magnet School that Erin attended. It's within a junior high school in east Austin. This fall he played football - wide receiver. Texas has a no-pass/no-play law wherein if you don't pass every course, you can't play sports. After the first report cards came out, half the team dropped off, reversing the team's impressive winning ascent to a downward losing freefall from which they never recovered. (Team motto: "White boys can't jump play football.")

So, in terms of winning, this has not been a memorable year for John, but character building to be sure. He has continued to improve his skills and still loves the competition and team aspects of play. And still, every morning John awakens to a comprehensive discussion with Ian about sports.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS & PROSPEROUS 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, spiritual peace for each one of us, clean air and water, spare time, and maybe just a few little trinkets.

*With Christmas love,
the Inglises*