

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

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

As I honour Christmas 1997 in my heart, I think fondly of friends like you and the personality traits which you possess that qualify you to receive the alternative Inglis newsletter, which has been written despite El Niño.

I think you should know that an Inglis committee reviews this newsletter before you receive it. This committee is composed of Inglises of the canine and feline orientation who, happily, were able to fit the review into their busy schedules. Sadly, however, this year they were unable to find the time for the Christmas picture sitting.

Pretty much it's the same every year. I read it to the dog. She listens attentively in a sitting position with ears perked up and head cocked to the side. When I finish she runs to me and commences an intense jumping lickfest thus indicating that it is the cleverest and best Christmas newsletter ever written.

This somewhat exaggerated response is balanced by that of the cat. He, on the other hand, looks mildly interested and slightly irritated in the beginning, stares off into space then sleeps snoring audibly during the middle, then at the end awakens and looks at me in a condescending, yet pitying manner thus indicating that he has never, EVER in his entire life heard anything quite so boring, inane, and yes, inappropriate for a family seasonal newsletter.

I take these two opinions, angst for two days, then yell at the cat, "Damnit! I'm mailing it anyway!!" And here you have it.

SNOWY

This year Snowy the Wonder Dog outgrew and survived her adorable little puppy behaviors without being offed by an irate owner—namely me. Things like, say, chewing up prized furniture.

Recall the subject of the 1995 Christmas letter: the dreaded Home Improvement Project. At that time Ian and I began replacing certain pieces of aesthetically hideous and unsafe furniture with "art" furniture signed by Texas artist David Marsh. In but a *twinkling* my prize bench/art became something the Salvation Army refused to accept on the grounds that it was aesthetically hideous and unsafe.

Ian has become quite attached to this dog that he was never going to have. When he was packing for a 10-day backpacking trip on which he was not going to take the dog, Snowy stared down at the floor momentarily. (She probably thought she saw a shard of my bench.) Ian became instantly convinced that the dog was heartbroken and promptly cancelled his flight plans and drove the dog all 22,000 miles out of Texas and into the Colorado wilderness.

KITTY COW-COW

Here you see Snowy and the cat doing what they do best—playing together. They are actually very close friends. This year the cat continues with his volunteer community environmental activities, which consist mainly of hunting excess squirrels and birds and then promptly throwing up their body parts on the rug. This keeps him quite busy and



active in his middle years, especially since it is quite difficult to even FIND a rug in this house.

IAN

The biggest news this year is that Ian has succumbed to the Dark Side. Yes, it's true. He actually switched from Macintosh to IBM—the unthinkable. But I know better. I love my Mac, and I'm stickin' with it for the long haul, however short that may be. I know 90% of you agree with Ian, but I don't care.

In less depressing news, Ian is fitting in not one, but FOUR backpacking trips this year (mainly with Snowy, John, and Ian's brother): one to the Chiricahua Mountains

(Arizona), one to the San Juan Mountains (Colorado), another to the West Elk Mountains (Colorado), and finally one after Christmas to Big Bend with five fellow defense attorneys and John. They asked me to go, but alas I remembered an important dental appointment and was forced to decline.

Ian still is very involved with John and sports. He was invited again this year to coach, but declined. All this activity despite his busy and demanding schedule defending criminals. How DOES he do it all? One technique is spending a lot less time on car and home repair. [See "CAR TALK".]

He and John continue to keep up with every single sports trivium imaginable and have developed a comical and entertaining language all their own.

Which, speaking of, one night when we were dining out with friends/photographers, the fabulous Susan and Jim Sigmon:

Ian (out of nowhere): "I've often thought what torture it would be to be forced to empty an oil pan by using solely the dipstick."

Thoughtful, yet awkward silence during which:

Burton (whispers): "I think we have just been given a rare and stunning panoramic view into the complexity of Ian's psyche."

Jim (daring to break the silence): "DIPSTICK! Isn't that a [bad word] who turns right in front of you without a turn signal?!"

TONI

Recall last year's picture with Hillary Clinton. Frankly, I am still reeling from the sting of her public statement that was printed in every major newspaper in the United States just three weeks after my Christmas letter came out.

The press had glommed on to a photo of her with an unbeknownst criminal, prompting her to state proactively, yet slightly defensively, "I cannot be held responsible for the multitudes of persons with whom I am photographed. We cannot do background checks on everyone." Well, thanks a lot, Hil.

The highlight of the year was my trip to Washington, D.C. in October, for Hillary's 50th birthday party. Okay, technically I was not invited, and it did just happen that her birthday coincided with the health policy conference I attended. I'm sure that had she known I would be in town, she would've invited me.

I heard and saw many wonderful things, including the beautiful fall foliage and awesome national monuments. But best of all I reacquainted myself with several longtime friends, including my cousin, the fabulous painter Hayes Friedman. [Find some of her work at artline.com; click on "artists".]

In a desperate attempt to defy the fact that I am so old that my first marriage is but a vague and semi-comical memory, I tried a triathlon this year. And, of all things, I liked it, especially since the competition for me is essentially eliminated due to age groupings. Not too many participants were born during the Truman administration. I did five this year, and I usually placed. Once I took 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place in a single triathlon!

Still love my nursing in neonatal intensive care and writing/editing for the healthcare network for which I work. I also do the occasional newspaper commentary and way too many community activities.

BURTON...AND MELISSA

Burton still has his beloved chickens at his place in Dallas and continues to entertain us with his reaction when Ian refers to them as the snack food link of the eco-chain for north Texas predators.

Big news here. Burton is engaged! Meet Melissa Arms here in the Love-Birds picture with which we can tease



them after the millennium when they settle into the more typical spousal posture.

She's a nurse in Dallas who scrubs for a group of neurosurgeons, and she is WONDERFUL! Melissa has many fabulous attributes, probably the most impressive of which is her ability to put up with not only neurosurgeons during surgery, but also *Burton!* I'm nominating her for the Nobel Prize for Patience.

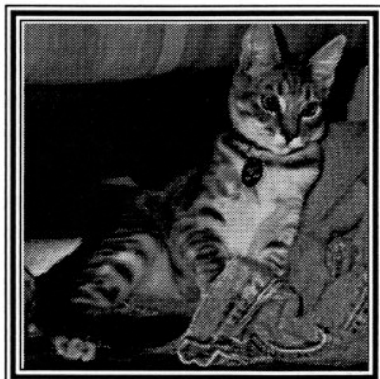
They're both around 30 and have never married. A May wedding in Austin is planned. Stay tuned for an account in the 1998 Christmas letter....

Burton's tree business continues to thrive, and he still has not fatally injured himself by falling from a ridiculous height with no safety net.

ERIN

Recall that last year's letter announced that Erin had just been accepted to Barnard College in Manhattan. After careful number crunching, it was discovered that the cost of her education there, with help, would amount to more than the combined gross national products of several small African nations, which alas we were unwilling to spring for.

Erin's going to UT and is deciding whether to go the premed or nurse practitioner route. She moved into a tiny but warm and wonderful house behind a house in Hyde Park (a cool neighborhood close to campus). She got a kitten named Maya. Meet Maya. Fortunately, the house does not have washer-dryer connections, so we still see her on a regular basis.



Erin pays for everything herself except rent, so she waitresses at the celebrated Threadgill's Restaurant and lives without a car.

JOHN

John's growing like a weed and is in the 8th grade. He turned out to be an ace pitcher—right up until he threw one of his famous fast pitches during a game, heard a pop in his right elbow, and hit the mound. After two casts and a near-surgery scare, it was pronounced that he would not pitch again until age 15. He's playing shortstop till then.

John played football again this year—1st string wide receiver and 2nd string quarterback. Someone failed to inform the coach that it IS legal to pass the ball, and alas he received not one pass the entire season. But he did get lots of good exercise randomly running on and off the field for no apparent reason. I missed the game containing his one play as quarterback wherein he "fumbled the snap", whatever that means.

The most remarkable thing about John's year was his dramatic entrance one evening into the living room from the kitchen. [There are two steps down into the living room from the kitchen.] We were watching *Desperado* for the 7th time during one weekend. I had already gotten my dinner and was settled in watching the, well, aesthetically delightful Antonio Banderas.

The classic scene was just about to begin wherein Steve Buscemi enters the Jalisco Bar, slowly stamps out his cigarette, and tells the "class acts" in the bar that "the BIGGEST Mexican" was coming toward their bar. Being, in my opinion, one of the greatest scenes in silver-screen history, I yelled to John to "HURRY UP OR YOU'LL MISS IT!!"

John has a plate of spaghetti in one hand, a bowl of squash in the other, and heads down the stairs. The spaghetti slides off the plate and *splat!* right onto the tile floor at the precise spot where his foot lands. He goes down with spaghetti and lower extremities flying. There he was, lying on his side, stunned, in a giant pool of red spaghetti looking not unlike a scene from *Desperado*. By some miracle he was still holding the unharmed plate and bowl. Truly a Kodak moment.

CAR TALK

Recall that in the early years of our marriage, before... (ominous organ music heard here) the Dreaded Back Surgery...Ian would while away major portions of his life repairing car and home, holding stubbornly to the standards of, say, nuclear power plants. Then we'd spend thousands of dollars undoing these random acts of "repair" committed against car and home. The surgery forced him to lay off, and he realized that, hey, he didn't HAVE to do all that.

Well, let me tell you THE PENDULUM HAS SWUNG. Now Ian's motto for car and home repair is: "If duct tape won't fix it, screw it." Case in point: I informed him that a somewhat lengthy segment of the rubber seal around the back window of my 1983 Nissan (bottom-of-the-line) Sentra was off and dangling down toward the license plate, and that I found this aesthetically unacceptable and slightly humiliating. The next day, I find that Ian has "repaired" it with yes, duct tape. The broken floor of the microwave oven is also "repaired" with duct tape. Oh, *It's a Wonderful Life.*

HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND A BRIGHT 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 Angises