

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

CHARLES DICKENS, A CHRISTMAS CAROL

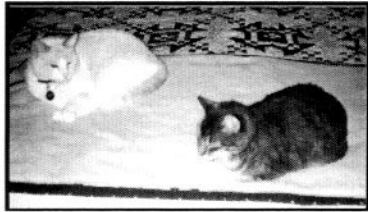
As I honour Christmas 2001 in my heart, I think fondly of friends like you and the personality traits you possess that qualify you to receive the Alternative Inglis Holiday Newsletter.

ANIMAL TALES

The big news this year is that our "purebred" border collie, **Snowy**, has finally perfected her Igor imitation. She's been working on it since the first time she saw Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein*. She makes me rewind over and over the part when Igor runs out to get the smart-person brain for the young Dr. Frankenstein (Gene Wilder) to surgically implant into his creation. Igor drops and breaks the specimen jar with the "good" brain and anxiously grabs another one:

Dr. Frankenstein (barely controlled anger): "Would you mind telling me whose brain I did put in?"

Igor: "Abby someone. Abby Normal. I'm almost certain that was the name."



No news from **Catticus** and **Maya** (the Burton and Erin College Refugee Cats) except that they have made peace with each other this year and have found, surprisingly, they have some things in common, for example certain frequently unreliable organs.

No news about the finches, **Amos** and **Andy**, except that this year they've become homosexual. Some history. When John was 12,

he exhibited his first flare for business acumen by deciding that he could acquire enough money to purchase a computer by raising and selling zebra finches. We bought a large cage, three finch pairs, three small straw nests, etc. That was five years ago, and the last time John changed the water in the cage was four years and 11 months ago. What's more, he never had the heart to sell the babies.

Aside from the abject failure as a business venture, I have grown weary of caring for these little ... birds. So, when the last female was found floating lifeless in the water bowl, I made the unilateral decision not to replace her. After Sapphire's untimely death, Amos and Andy chirped and pecked at each other in a hostile manner, obviously attempting to establish alpha.

After a few days, more friendly chirping was followed by their becoming inseparable. Obviously in love, they swing, eat, bathe, and nap together. And despite having two nests, Amos and Andy sleep together every night in the same nest. Impressively adaptable, these birds.



Snowy's Igor (Marty Feldman) impersonation

IAN

Ian still practices criminal defense law, rides the bus everywhere, and as the Austin neighborhoods representative still works pretty effectively toward enlightened transportation policy.

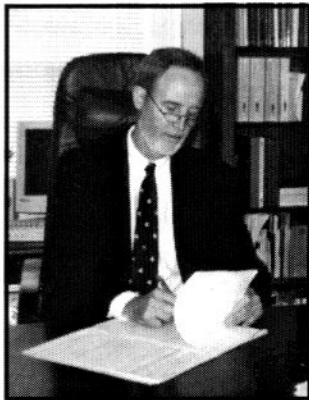
Sacrificing romance for practicality, last Christmas I gave Ian a Sonicare® electric toothbrush, which, as you know brushes teeth at 31,000 strokes per minute, runs for a full two minutes before shutting off, and sounds like some sort of injured dolphin underwater. This gift choice was the biggest mistake of my life.

Instead of wandering about the house with a manual toothbrush dripping toothpaste slime for less than a minute (the *Good Old Days*), he now wanders around dropping nickel-size blobs all over the dark-stained wood floors for a full two minutes. This is not a problem for Ian, for inasmuch as fish are unaware of the stock market, Ian is unaware of the blobs. I, however, could see them even if I were under anesthesia. What's worse, he talks at the same time.

Ian (lulled into a trance by the dolphin-like sound, dripping, and looking out our bedroom window onto the idyllic backyard-with-creek-running-through-it scene, sounding excited): "Wook! I'sa kresed yewwo-cron nack heywhon!"

Toni (damp cloth in hand and shrew-like): "I don't [bad word-ing] care if it is a crested yellow-crown night heron. I care about the [bad word-ing] floor!"

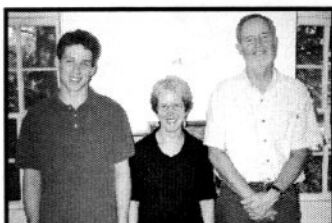
Ian (thinking): "There's that short person again with the blubbery mid-section mopping up nothing under the window while muttering hostile gibberish. She's very odd. But, ah, my teeth feel great!"



Ian's Frozen Caveman Lawyer impersonation



Amos & Andy
The Unambiguously Gay Duo



John-Lilliputian-Ian

With Erin gone and John having grown, this year I live as midget in the Land of Giants — John and Ian. They converse happily in their deep voices about sports and computers, and I'm pretty sure they can neither see nor hear me.

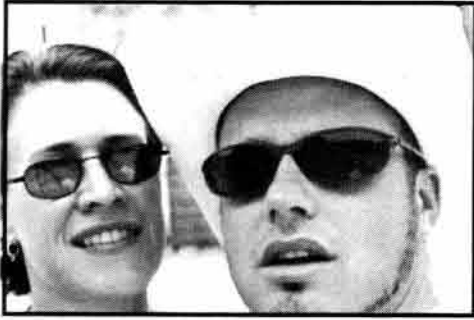
This year my main job continues as changer of the household toilet paper rolls, as I apparently am the only person with the skill to perform this complex task. Between that and cleaning up toothpaste slime, there's precious little time for much else.

Fortunately, we go through toilet paper infrequently enough so that I have time for income-producing activities such as neonatal intensive care nursing and writing for and editing a monthly nursing publication for the hospital network. Some news of note this year is that I signed a contract to write free-lance for a national nursing publication. I'm cautiously optimistic that this may turn into more commercial writing opportunities.

I'm still on the MHMR board and write newspaper commentaries, both of which are more rewarding than Toilet Paper and Toothpaste Duty.



BURTON & MELISSA



Melissa & Burton in Oaxaca, Mexico

Melissa is still a neurosurgery nurse in Dallas, and Burton is still working (for himself) as an arborist. This year they took a three-week car trip to Mexico and had lots of wonderful adventures there.

They also visited friends in Washington state where Burton went fishing wearing waders and felt boots in the icy waters of the Hoh River. Just before dark a hard tug to his line began what he would call "the fishing experience of a lifetime." A strong and valiant steelhead trout gave Burton a magnificent fight, at one point

pulling him down into the water. Melissa, watching from a distance, became alarmed when Burton abruptly disappeared. Unwilling to let go of the line and unable to get footing, the fish pulled him downstream a bit before Burton finally emerged triumphant, walking the fish out of the water. The next three nights Burton, Melissa and friends had fabulous trout dinners.



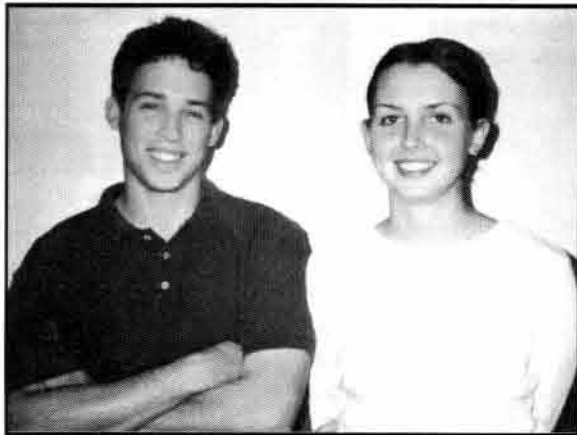
Burton 1, Fish 0

That's about it, except for the fact that *THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE A BABY!* It's true. In June. Yee-ha!

ERIN

Having done well on the MCAT (medical college admission test) this year, Erin was on track to graduate magna cum laude this month (December) with a BA in Biology from UT-Austin, travel a bit, and start medical school in the fall. She interviewed at all five medical schools to which she applied. But sadly, her life plans have been sabotaged by a group of militant and evil arthropods.

Her Genetics project was to mate and produce fruit flies with recessive double mutations (specifically, brown eyes rather than red, and short bristles rather than long on their little heads and thoraces). Beginning in Sept., three times a week she'd go to Genetics lab, anesthetize her flies with CO₂, then examine them under the light microscope looking for double-mutant males and females to mate. Disheartened, it wasn't until Thanksgiving that she finally found a double-mutant female, which she immediately isolated in her own vial. One week later she found a double-mutant male, released him into the female's vial and started playing Johnny Mathis albums by candlelight for them. It's almost Christmas, and alas ... nothing. Not only do they have to mate, but they have to produce a stock containing all double mutants. "OBVIOUSLY," Erin pointed out, "the female had to have been a virgin, which is not likely."



Erin of course is convinced that she will now starve and die. Doubly-mutant fruit fly progeny or not, she will hear in February if she's accepted to medical school. We're hopeful and optimistic.

JOHN

John is a senior this year. He's still playing baseball and is the starting shortstop on the Varsity team. He's been working out in baseball class every day. So much so, in fact, that he is now legally classified as construction equipment.

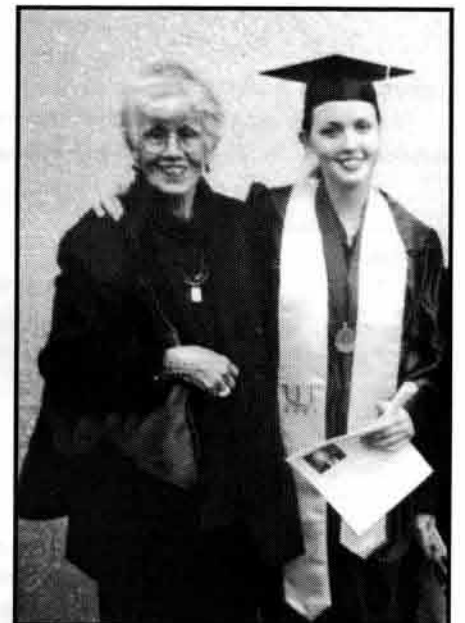
No real sequelae from getting hit in the head with a baseball last year, except that he's applied to Texas A&M University (and a couple of emergency back-up colleges). And also since the injury, clothes, years-old school assignments, and computer parts have piled up on the floor of his room. He used to be a real neatnik. Now a person can't walk through his room, not even Ian while brushing his teeth. I'd help him pick up, but I'm afraid I might find Jimmy Hoffa buried under the rubble.

He's become quite proficient at assembling computers and can still set my digital watch without reading the instruction manual, a feat which to me is unimaginably impressive.

LATE-BREAKING NEWS FLASH!

Erin went to Genetics lab today and discovered about 30 baby fruit flies in the vial. She anesthetized them, and heart pounding, she examined them under the microscope searching for the Holy Grail. Lo and Behold, every single one of the progeny turned out to be double mutants. Squinting through tears of joy, relief, and disbelief, the last little mutant she examined under the microscope held up a tiny, hand-lettered sign that read, "Hapi Krismus 2 all."

*Love,
The Inglis's*



Grand'mère Inglis with Erin, who graduates despite The Great Fruit Fly Rebellion of 2001