

I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.

– Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 1843



Snowy (1996-2010)

The beloved Snowy's trail ended Aug. 6. Nearly blind and deaf, she valiantly endured crippling osteoarthritis, depression and finally end-stage liver and kidney disease. Her customary unconditional and unending affection for those she loved will be missed sorely by a heartbroken family of total weirdos.

I remember Snowy best for her extraordinary writing skills. For several years, she took over writing this holiday newsletter when I was too frazzled to get the job done. Many commented that Snowy's letters were more insightful, which totally pissed me off. I'm okay with that now.



Ian remembers Snowy best for being a terrific trail dog on the many hiking trips they took together, both in-town and to state and national parks. She would trot out ahead of Ian, stop and sniff around while Ian kept going, then shoot past him like a bullet – repeating the behavior over and over until trail's end.

Snowy was John's 12th birthday gift. He nicknamed her the "licker machine" for her propensity to lick every square millimeter of exposed skin upon greeting those she loved. He best remembers her as a terrific outfielder. As Ian pitched thousands of balls to John over the years, Snowy would wait in the infield, frozen as she stared at the bat with her great oversized ears pointed toward the heavens. With the crack of the bat, she would race to the outfield as if shot from a cannon, returning the ball to the pitcher's mound, never tiring.

Erin remembers that when she came to visit, Snowy would freeze with trembling excitement and anticipation, then when she couldn't stand it any longer would burst forth to greet Erin, living up to her licker nickname. Yet she was gentle and polite – always the sweet lady.

As we honour Christmas 2010 in our hearts, we think fondly of friends like you and the personality traits you possess that qualify you to receive the alternative Inglis newsletter – the Greatest Gift of all.

(Burton's remembrance of Snowy, in his words.) Snowy was a fearful little creature much of the time. Rarely social and comforted by routine, I often thought she had canine Aspergers syndrome. As the dementia of old age set in for Snowy, some of the cooler aspects of her porcelain personality began to crack – crack like a smile. More often in her later days, I saw that universal dog expression on her face: mouth open, lolling tongue, careless ears and warm eyes that are the indisputable smile of a dog – like little Buddhas, at peace with the universe. Cruelly, we are destined to watch our dogs (and cats) grow old and die over and over. Perhaps they are little lessons of love and loss to prepare us for the passing of our human loved ones. Rest in peace, Snowy.

Ian

Speaking of routine, Ian's section is much the same as last year's. He still starts the day by making coffee (occasionally exploding it in the microwave) and violating protocol by reading the Sports section of the paper first.

He's still defending criminals and enjoying life at the office with the guys. When you've got nine self-employed criminal defense attorneys working under one roof, you've got a combination of *The Office* and *Saturday Night Live*.

For example, their receptionist, Lauren Shugart, has been one of Ian's best employees – smart, hard-working, a friend of John's from high school. She's rather quiet – you'd have to be to work in that office.

This year, Lauren distinguished herself by getting hauled off to jail from the office in handcuffs for an unpaid parking ticket. She further elevated her status by winning a HOES (hands on an eggplant sub) contest at "Home Slice Pizza." One of the rules is you're out if you mess



With three holdouts left, Lauren, on left rests.



in front of the Rogue Ales Public House in Portland, Ian's favorite brew

yourself, but they do give you a bathroom break every 10 hours. No problem, right? Determined, she kept her hand on the sub for 64 hours – more than twice as long as last year's winner (a guy). What a champ. The event raised \$12,000 for charity, and Lauren won free pizza for a year! With what Ian pays, she needs that.

Ian continues to explore Big Bend (a national park). After scouting trips into unknown territory with the consummate outdoorsman, Burton, he returns with various folks – high school buddies, off-cemates, etc.

Toni

Life is as usual this year – a series of mistakes, large and small, scattered with the rare success. We don't have space to touch on the myriad mistakes, but this year I achieved two successes so

stunning that I have to brag.

First, the necessities: Still riding my scooter, working full-time in neonatal and writing for the hospital system and the newspaper. (My newspaper editor lets

me write about anything I want!) And I'm ecstatic to announce that after 16 years, I have sworn off boards to have more time.

Okay. Now for the successes. At 10 a.m. on Ian's 60th birthday (Oct. 26), I thought for the *first* time about what I might get him. "We'll go out for dinner," I thought, "maybe our favorite restaurant." But as the minutes passed, I felt more and more uneasy with something

so mundane. After all, this is one of his last birthdays ending in zero before he's ... not this young.

At 10:30, I had an appointment with the aesthetician whose tough job it is to keep me from looking like a cadaver. She suggested a surprise party. What a joke. Every party I've ever planned has been a disaster, like John's second birthday when his best friend put his head down on the picnic table and cried hard at the sight of the cake I had made from scratch. (Erin, age seven, had tried to talk me into cupcakes made from a mix. She planned all of his parties thereafter.)

But I figured, what the hell. At noon, with negative (from zero) expectations, I began calling each of his off-cemates and a couple of other buddies. Every single one of them accepted and arrived at the agreed-upon time for dinner. He was completely and totally surprised. Had no idea. That night, he said it was the best birthday party he ever had and next day he kept thanking me. I still can't believe I actually pulled off a successful birthday party.

The other unprecedented success was our trip to visit Erin, who's a psych nurse in Portland, Ore. We flew to Chicago, ate at our favorite restaurant – Rick Bayless'



about to pig out at Chicago's Frontera Grill

Frontera Grill – then launched out on Amtrak's 44-hour Empire Builder route to Portland, spending nights (two) in our sleeper car.

The route goes along the Canadian border – a beautiful part of the country that I'd never seen. It was heaven – on time the whole way, relaxation, all you can eat and drink, time alone together with no distractions, tables and great views in the lounge car, plugs for devices, Internet if you have tethering, interesting people.



amazed by the Columbia River Gorge

Getting up at sunrise to view the spectacular Columbia River Gorge, we rolled into Portland's gorgeous train station before 11 a.m.

Burton (by Burton)

There comes a point in life when change becomes necessary, whether it's the dog rolling in carrion, a dirty diaper or the more subtle foundations of the life we have chosen for ourselves – inevitably a more painful realization.

When do we choose to shake the "etch a sketch" of our lives? I did this year. As my dreams and plans were swept away like so much scored graphite, so were some of my greatest fears and reservations.

Divorce. The inevitable ending to 50 percent of all American matrimony that young couples never imagine. The quintessential stigmatic failure and yet the merciful second-chance renaissance. Even the simplest are ugly and complicated. Thankfully ours was not the worst. The settlement involved no major disputes, just our inability to accept each other as a daily reality. But there it is. The difficult solution to a really difficult problem.



Talula, now eight, will be equally shared and is holding up the best she can. The pets are unaware, as far as I can tell. The things have all been agreeably divided. We are trying to sell the house in the most pitifully flaccid market, living under the same roof like reality-show divas, both praying to sell the home we both love.

Pivotal in this process was a trip I took with Ian to Big Bend. I realized it must happen in the still of the desert with the dry and predictable stability that is Ian's company. The rugged and dire landscape of the desert offers infinite silent counsel to those who seek it. Surviving and finding comfort in the desert requires a clear mind and singularity of purpose – just what I needed, when I needed it. Thank you, Ian. So on I go.

Despite everything, all of us are healthy and well. This inconvenience will lead to a lifestyle improvement for all of us eventually. *Ah, l'amour ... c'est la vie.*



finding comfort with Ian in the desert

John (by John)

2010 has been a good year for me. Having completed my probationary period as a firefighter in Schertz, TX, I've progressed from probie to rookie. This means I'm subject to the scrutiny of my fellow firefighters approximately 10 percent less of the time. But it also means that I can dish back out a little of what they give me.

The work is strenuous, tenacious and defeating at times. But the guys on my shift handle themselves well, and those on my truck get along really well. There's nothing I'd rather do than be a firefighter and for that, I am grateful.

It was really sad to lose Snowy. She had a good life and gave me some of my happiest memories, but it was her time. Partly to give Snowy company, this year I got a kitten, Tina. In the beginning, she hissed every time Snowy came close, but Snowy couldn't hear her. Later, they developed a friendship and when Snowy left, Tina looked for her for a long time.



Tina



Austin Lifestyle magazine celebrated giving, featuring John for his volunteer work

This was also a year of travel. I took my annual trip to the Coachella music festival (California) in April. It was the best yet. For three days straight, I drank beer, listened and danced to some of the best musicians/DJs and met a lot of cool music enthusiasts from all over the world.

In August, I visited Erin in Portland and was awed by the gargantuan evergreen trees in and surrounding the city. Realizing the city's smart design and great transportation, within a few hours I knew why she made the move. After Portland, I traveled north to Seattle, the San Juan Islands and Vancouver. The snow-capped mountains and endless sea were a reminder of how beautiful life is.

I hope everyone has a wonderful holiday season and stays safe.

Erin (by Erin)

Hello, friends and family. I hope your 2010s have been wonderful and full of smiles, ridiculousness, amazement and cute pets.

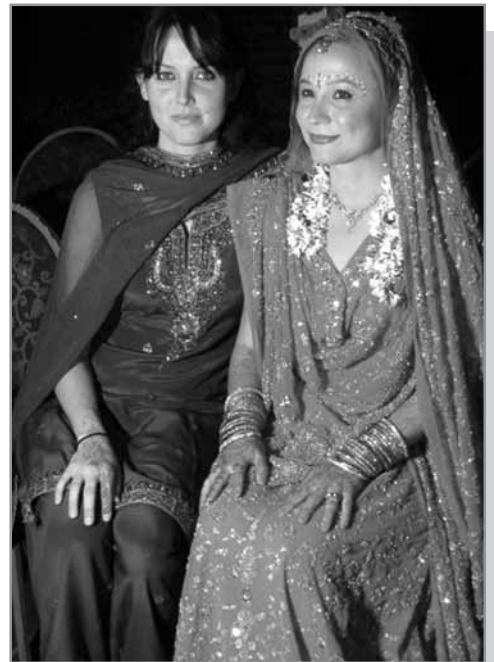
My 2010 was full of just that. Smiles as I celebrated with and said goodbyes to dear old friends in Austin. Ridiculousness as I made the cross-country journey to Portland, Ore., where I now live and practice nursing. Constant amazement in my new city, so gorgeous and green. I love looking up from my neighborhood streets to see vast expanses of dense forest, and the misty haze that rises from it with the weather. It's an absolute delight every time I see the bright orange poppies and bright pink cherry



blossoms that cover the city in springtime.

More amazement came when I traveled to India to see a dear friend get married. I delighted in the smoky streets of Delhi and the very much alive countrysides of Rajasthan, making new, wonderful friends throughout.

I'm grateful for all that's happened in my 2010. Cute pet Pouncy loves Portland very much as well, enjoying his comfy new place. As I make more smiles and ridiculousness, exploration and amazement with new friends in 2011, please come visit! We can meet at Powell's and go for some Stumptown. Hike Forest Park. You'll love it, too. Love you all. xxoo



Erin with the bride



Here's wishing you a 2011 full of trails, pets, baseball fielders, parks, surprises, other cultures, trains, views, huge trees, music, and of course, lots of applause.

*Love,
the Inglists*

~ 2010 ~

800 W. 5th St., #805
Austin, TX 78703

toni@inglistexas.us
ian@ianinglis.com
www.ianinglis.com
www.ingliscommentary.com