

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

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 1843

AS WE HONOUR CHRISTMAS 2014 IN OUR HEARTS, WE THINK FONDLY OF FRIENDS LIKE YOU AND THE PERSONALITY TRAITS YOU POSSESS THAT QUALIFY YOU TO RECEIVE THE 22ND ANNUAL ALTERNATIVE INGLIS NEWSLETTER. BUT ENOUGH ABOUT YOU.

Competition (or lack thereof)

In newsletters from Christmases past, you may have noted several recurring themes — Ian's affinity to reggae, travel plans gone awry, etc.

Which reminds me. Once about 30 or 40 years ago, Ian pronounced "awry" as AW-ree in an otherwise enlightened conversation. I confess that I have never allowed him to live that down. That's probably because compared to his, my vocabulary is a pea to his watermelon, but dammit, I can pronounce uh-RYE!!

When he uses a word in casual conversation that I don't know, I morph from the sweet, understanding, unassuming, laid-back person that I am ... into this:



Me, on left, '52

Hearing things like "Let's *repair* to the living room" or "Deliberation in the House will soon devolve to the use of *cudgels*," I experience the same sensation that a cow must feel when out of the blue some asswipe sticks a red-hot branding iron to his hind quarters.

But it's not all bad. There are fleeting moments of happiness. For example, while reading the morning newspaper the morning of Sept. 22:

Ian: "That's weird. The Statesman says the first day of fall is tomorrow. I'm pretty sure it's today."

Toni: (triumphant laughter sounding like Snidely Whiplash) "HA!! Every dip___ knows it's on the 21st!"

Ian: (smiling, as if witnessing a puppy attempt to repair a transmission) "No, dear. You see, *blah blah* sun seen at zenith *blah blah* Earth's axis *blah blah* atmospheric refraction *blah blah* vernal"

Toni: What?

Then, in a moment of crushing personal defeat, the fall equinox occurred later that day, Sept. 22, at 9:59 p.m. CST.

Vacation

We have a little more time for vacation now that we both work less. I'm working half-time writing *NursingNews* (monthly) for Seton, and the *Austin American-Statesman* cut my word count from 750 to 625 per monthly commentary. Ian works less because he refuses to 1) advertise on social media and 2) pay the monopolistic Google ("The Man") for first-page advertising. Also, everyone's broke.

It's a cruel irony that by the time you're old enough to have more time to travel, your judgment and memory have taken a nosedive, and forgetfulness becomes a major issue. For example, throwing your round-trip Amtrak tickets in the trash after you arrive, throwing your boarding pass in the trash before you board, leaving a trail of debris (phone chargers, clothes, etc.) all along the travel route or forgetting the water when you camp in the desert.

No. 1: Jamaica

Ian has been trying to get me to go to Jamaica with him for years. This year I gave in thinking it would be a shame for him to never get to go, plus I love the water and there's a reasonable chance we wouldn't get mugged or shot.

With Ian, you see, it's not just about the music. No, it's the whole Rastafarian thing, which best I can tell is roughly: Ethiopians are oppressed and exploited. Emperor Haile Selassie (Rastafari is somewhere in his family name) runs the Italians (the "downpressor") out of Ethiopia in the 1930s. That triggers a movement in Jamaica, and they believe him to be a messiah. In 1966, Selassie goes to Jamaica to tell them he is not a god, but they can't be fooled. They knew, after smoking enough herb, that he would usher in a naturalistic golden age of brotherly love, peace and prosperity, and they made some nice music to reflect that notion. Nice story, but I always thought it sounded like stoned ramblings.

A demonic rubbing together of the hands was audible from wide-eyed, cheerful natives upon seeing the nice (gullible) elderly couple. They seemed to be convinced that the sole reason we were there was to buy weed; everywhere we went the locals approached Ian in muffled tones.

We never got mugged, but it was theft by a thousand gouges. We went to the famed Rick's Cafe, where on seeing the cliffs, I knew I had to conquer one. I high-dived as a kid, but Ian wouldn't hear of it, so I settled for a jump from a 35-foot high cliff. I was never trained to high-jump and



Vacation (continued)

learned the hard way that there's a technique. Who knew? If you don't hold your arms close to the body, you will tilt during the descent. I landed squarely on my tailbone (which healed in only four months).

When I came up for air, scared and smarting, a native was right in front of me in the water frantically signaling to me to follow him. "Come with me! Hurry!"

I followed him, convinced I would be arrested if I didn't. We swam a few feet away to a tiny cave where he announced proudly, "Bob Marley smoked the collie weed in here." So freakin' what? As we left, another Rastafarian was leading Ian into the cave. As my guy and I climbed out of the water, he announced, "That'll be \$40."

The two of us got into a brawl, which ended with his two buddies dragging him away. About that time, Ian and his guy climbed out of the water, only Ian, who is on blood thinners, was bleeding like a stuck pig from his forehead, temple, a hand, foot, arm, knee and shoulder. He explained, remarkably calmly, that just as he got inside the cave, a wave came and smashed him against the sharp rocks. And for THAT, his guy wanted (and got) \$40.

The worst part was that, although Bob Marley was playing on every radio, Ian never could find anyone in Jamaica playing decent reggae.

No. 2: Sierra Nevada World Music Festival

Ian was not to be denied his reggae, so a month later he went to the revered Sierra Nevada festival in Mendocino.

Camped in a tent on the fairgrounds, he made new friends and danced to the likes of Clinton Fearon and Josey Wales. Horace Andy canceled at the last minute, which Ian still hasn't gotten over: "That _____ stood me up!"

He took several videos, but I had to stop watching after two because I was losing IQ points with each frame. He's determined to go every year with dreams of maybe one day seeing the likes of the Gladiators, the Congos, Joseph Hill, Israel Vibration, iNi Kamoze and SOJA (Soldiers of Jah Army).



The cliffs at Rick's Cafe



Before the jump, smiling and able to sit

Remember that peace and brotherly love thing from a few paragraphs back? When Ian hears good reggae, he totally gets into that mindset and involuntarily transforms from a stiff cracker to someone who dances his way into the hearts of those around him.



Ian with fellow festival-goers

No. 3: Big Bend National Park

"That's it, no more," I announced after Jamaica, fed up with air travel, hotels and strangers who may not have our best interest at heart. "Let's go back to Big Bend," I suggested, having not been there — the most majestic place on Earth — since the kids were little. Ian's an authority on Big Bend since he's gone to different parts of the park with his buddies and/or Burton or John or Erin a couple of times a year for several decades. He decided we'd go to the desert. Just the two of us. What could go wrong?

When we got to the park, Ian turned the Subaru down a road that was so primitive a mule would refuse to traverse it.

Toni: "What the _____ is THIS?"

Ian: "It's the Old Ore Road. It's unchanged from the early 1900s when they used it to transport ore from Mexican mines by mule or pack train to the railroad station in Marathon."

Toni: "Then what the hell are WE doing on this road?"

Ian: "Don't worry, dear, we'll be at our campsite in no time." That was 2 p.m.

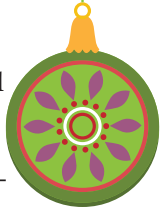
There were so many steep drop-offs in the road that we stopped several times to gauge if the car would roll over on its side. Normally you don't associate white knuckles with going 4 mph, but there I was, certain we'd have a flat tire or a rock would impale some vital organ under the car. More than once I wondered aloud in a curious, yet furious manner why it was that two elderly people were in the middle of nowhere on the deserted road from hell with no cell service, no 4-wheel drive and no special tires.

Almost at the campsite, Ian stopped the car and let go with an expletive that rang from the mountaintops. What?! "I forgot the water," he exclaimed, looking as if he just drew the No. 1 draft card in 1970. Instantly realizing we wouldn't have to wash dishes, "It's OK," I said. "We've got that bag with 2-3 quarts of water in it, and we can always use melted ice from the ice chest," which we did. Further, we had enough beer to not die of thirst.

After going the speed of a slow jog, at 4 p.m. we arrived at our campsite, 10 miles from where we turned onto the Old Ore Road. We set up camp, hiked a bit, then uncorked the



The Old Ore Road



wine as we cooked a deliciously succulent pork chop on the hibachi.

That evening, all was right with the world when we witnessed the biggest moon I'd ever seen rise slowly from behind a mountain, so bright that we extinguished the lantern. The sky became a celestial aquarium of mind-blowing clarity. The Milky Way, satellites, meteorites, stars (some shooting) — we were feeling ourselves fusing with the universe. Or maybe it was just the wine.

It turned out to be one of the best trips ever. The



Ian, absorbed with his "topo" (topographic) maps



only vehicle we saw until we got back on the normal road two days later was a ranger truck. We had plenty of water, and the discovery that a damp



paper towel eliminates the need to wash dishes was a real game-changer.

It rained before we got there, so everywhere the desert flowers were in bloom.

Downtown living

Being the 10th year that we've lived downtown, seems like everyone asks if we still like living downtown. Yes, but the shine is off the diamond.

When we moved here in 2004, it was a nice, sleepy neighborhood with no bars. But a mere decade has brought about some changes:

- **Construction** — Like Germany after World War II, downtown Austin is being totally rebuilt. In the photo below, you can see seven of the 13 construction cranes visible from our balcony right

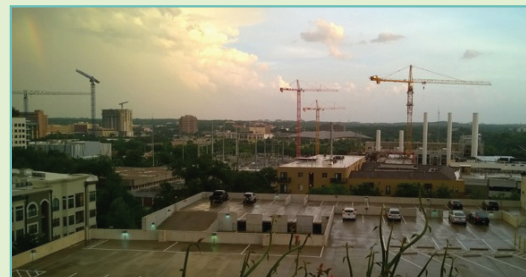
now. That's not all bad news.

A block away we're getting a Trader Joe's and a killer [public library](#). Plus, most of the new buildings are handsome and make a nice skyline.

- **Sloshed city** — Bars have sprung up all over our "Market District" that had no bars. We now live

on the western edge of the drunkest zip code in Texas in one of the drunkest cities in the United States, outranking even New Orleans and Las Vegas. So, every Friday and Saturday night around 2:15 a.m., we're awakened by sloshed little darlings spilling out from the bars, getting ready to drive their cars home because our "progressive" city consistently votes no to rail.

But despite the year-round drunks, car alarms, lack of decent public transportation, sirens, nightly loud amplified music played without permits and way beyond the legal decibel limits, distracted and aggressive drivers, street noise, traffic congestion, deafening motorcycles driven by genitalia-challenged men, construction noise and dust, constant runs and festivals with road closings and the [occasional machine-gun fire](#) a block away, we do still like living downtown. The convenience of Ian walking to and from work every day along the creek where he talks to the birds and turtles and knows all the homeless by name — that and the views from our place overshadow the negatives. I guess there are tradeoffs wherever you live.



Erin explores Vancouver.



Erin still loves Portland and her nursing job. She appreciates the simple things, like clouds, sun and warm weather.



In Portland, enjoying coffee at Stumptown



Ian and Erin went with a parks group to clear invasive ivy from the forest floor and trees in Portland.



When I told Burton my tomato-biscuit cobbler sucked, he replied, 'Oh, come on, Toni. Everybody loves tomato and biscuits.'



Toni softens the honey.



For two years I've complained bitterly to Ian about not getting a bonus or pay increase from my hospital. He went to Seton for a lab test during Nurses Week, and on seeing this banner he texted me the photo saying 'Here's your annual bonus, crybaby.'



Ian flew the Scottish flag at his office and hoped they would vote for independence.



I asked Ian to put the chicken in the freezer and to label it thusly.



In March, John met AJ, a very special person in his life.



From left, Ian, Tad Wooten, AJ and John on a December trip to Big Bend



Burton's still doing phenomenal tree work.



John shows Talula around his fire station.



Burton, Talula and Frankie in Santa Fe to snowboard



Tina, exhausted after reading the paper



John with Aggie defensive end Myles Garrett



Here's wishing you a **2015 FULL OF REGGAE,**
the stars and the moon, a campfire, maybe some rain,
water to drink and lots of **APPLAUSE.**

Love,
The Angises

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