

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
2021 IN OUR HEARTS, WE THINK
FONDLY OF FRIENDS LIKE YOU
AND THE PERSONALITY TRAITS
YOU POSSESS THAT QUALIFY YOU
TO RECEIVE THE 29TH ANNUAL
ALTERNATIVE INGLIS NEWSLETTER
BUT ENOUGH ABOUT YOU...

As we honour 2021 in our hearts, we think fondly of the miracle of vaccines and how they set us "free at last" from 2020, the pandemic and social unrest year from hell. I felt like Rosie the riveter giving vaccines to the public in April alongside my son John (firefighter,) who was also giving shots.

After standing in long lines, when it was their turn, excited people would say things like, "Now I get to see my mom! I haven't see her in more than a year!!" We feel honored to have been able to participate in this public health triumph.

We also feel fortunate to have emerged unscathed from The Big Freeze. Hundreds of Texans didn't. Our leaders were far too busy writing bills to oppress women and voters to regulate our power grid. Ah.

On a happier note ... John and AJ's twins

Will and Andrew are as sweet as they are a reliable source of pure delight.

Walter about to
catch a snowball



BACK-SEAT
BLACK TOWEL
WARS

Recall that in 2020, we decided that to get outside, we needed a travel trailer and rented several types to test them. The last one we rented was a nüCamp Tab 400, a Swedish design. It was perfect! So, we bought one.



Friend Peggy Pickle (Jake's daughter) observed, "Mygod, Toni, I've had purses bigger than that trailer."

It finally arrived in April, and in May its ceremonial launch was to Marathon just outside Big Bend National Park. We drove to the storage unit in Round Rock where Ian hitched up the trailer and carefully laid out the black towel in the back seat placing a bed pillow in the middle and fluffing it up for The Royal Dog.

Two things to understand first: 1) Our 2016 VW Touareg is probably more precious to Ian than I am. Not only is it the first car we've owned that he actually fits in, but also the first with *leather seats*. 2) Walter is a schnauzer, and schnauzers nest when settling in for a good nap or for the night: With head down, he launches into a digging motion so fast and furious that his front legs are a blur. Then he picks up the towel or blanket with his teeth and arranges it just so. He circles around, then lies down happy with a satisfied plop followed by a sigh.

Ian is convinced that without a towel over the back seat Walter will scratch the leather when he nests. But I hate that damn towel because: 1) no matter how neatly Ian lays it out, it's always a mess, 2) every twig, grass and sticker that clings to Walter's curly leg hairs ends up on the towel,

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and 3) *importantly*, Walter has yet to leave *one single mark* on those seats despite nesting directly on them!

Back to the ceremonial launch ... after Ian prepped the back seat for Wonderdog, off we went in our new trailer! When we got to Menard, he pulled into the Alon station to get gas. The fellow getting gas on the other side of the pump became intensely interested in the trailer and asked Ian to show him inside. *Perfect!!*

I crept out of the passenger seat, snuck the black towel out of the back seat, hid it, snuck back into the passenger seat and picked up my Kindle pretending to read. (Think the **Grinch stealing toys** from the sleeping Whos.)

Ian waved good-bye to the man and turned to get gas, only to discover all they had was regular.

Ian: WHAT??!! How can a [expletive] gas station not have PREMIUM??!!

Toni: [yawn]

A little down the road, the Eldorado town grocery / Phillips 66 sold premium. Ian inserted his credit card into the pump and picked up the nozzle. Just as the nozzle approached the tank, in the side mirror I could see, *in slow motion*, gas beginning to spew into the back seat.

Imagine Ian's surprise and vocabulary! He let out a tapestry of obscenities so loud it must've rung from the Sierra Madre mountaintops. Ordinarily, I would've fussed at him for that, but terror changes a person.

Toni (thinking, with saucer eyes, "SH*T!! Wait'll he sees the towel is gone and there's gasoline on the seats!!" Feigning shock): Ohmygosh, Ian! What happened, dear?

Ian: The [expletive] nozzle had a [expletive] hair-trigger!!

Toni: (sinks down in seat and picks up Kindle.)

Ian was so beside himself that he never noticed I had removed the towel! AND, my luck continuing, it was a 75-degree day, so we could keep the windows down for the fumes to air out! Yee-ha! It's Christmas year round!



Back to the inaugural Marathon trip. Everything on the trailer worked great, that is, until it flooded. Ian hooked up the hose to flush out the black water tank, but when he turned on the spigot, water gushed out of the bottom of the trailer.

Imagine Ian's surprise and vocabulary! The folks working in the nūCamp factory in Ohio: "I know! See this joint hidden under the bed that only the dealer can get to? Let's not tighten it! What a great prank! Hahaha!" Three weeks in the repair shop to tighten the hidden connection.

In June, we met childhood friends Sandra and CA Martin, who also have an RV, in South Padre. To get to the mouth of the grand river in the Lower Rio Grande Wildlife Refuge [Sandra and CA are birders,] we passed Elon Musk's SpaceX Starbase. Um, big!!

Note to self: Never again go to a Texas beach in the heat of the summer.

Back at the trailer, starving, we ordered yummy Italian takeout. I served the food on the table despite Walter's standing on it (to get a better view of the outside.) As I shooed him off the table, his back legs



With Sandra



rocketed both plates onto the new, carefully selected light grey upholstered seats. Oiley, tomatoey food all over the new seats...and *no dinner!* **Imagine my surprise and vocabulary!**

In July, note to self ignored, we took our granddaughter Talula, who was home from Reed College for the summer, to a beach on Follett's Island, near Galveston. Great way to test the trailer for 3 people, right? On the first night, when we turned down the dining room table to make it into a bed for her, the rail holding it promptly came loose. **Imagine Ian's surprise and vocabulary!**

We chose that beach because the **"RV paradise"** there was rated so highly by the RV community.

Unfortunately, no one mentioned the ginormous marsh next to it, so when you stepped out of the trailer, you were instantly *covered* in bloodthirsty Texas mosquitoes.

At least on the beach we had a breeze and no mosquitoes. But the waves were short of 3 inches high and no people — in July! Even the birds were smart enough to avoid that beach. Maybe they abandoned the

shore for the marshes. Nonetheless, Talula enjoyed **looking for shore specimens**, and in the air-conditioned trailer she serenaded us with karaoke (sans mic) to her music. I think she knows the words to every song ever written. After that, another 3 weeks in the shop to fix the rail.

In August and September, we made the annual trek to Washington's San Juan Island to visit my friend Claudia Coose and her sweet dogs. Friday Harbor was its usual magical place. Lots of hiking through the forests with the dogs, yummy fresh-caught seafood, beautiful water, **gorgeous boats and yachts in the harbors**, scenery including Mount Baker and the Olympic Peninsula ... and best of all, Claudia's company.

But it was there that Ian crawled under the trailer to vent the hot water tank only to mistake

that cap with the glycol cap. As antifreeze came gushing down his outstretched arm, **Imagine Ian's surprise and vocabulary!** Enough escaped so that we could no longer run the heater with the glycol system. After the trip, another 3 weeks in the shop.

In November, we headed to Big Bend where we again met Sandra and CA AND our friends Betty (who could've made it as a stand-up comedienne) and Billy Koger who we've known for 40 years. I know you don't know Betty's granddaughter Maggie, and neither do I, but you GOTTA see **this video she made!!**

One problem with traveling when you're older is your mind goes to LaLa Land when you pack. For example, on this Big Bend trip, I forgot ... pants. For 9 days I wore the same threadbare pants hiking and camping that I wore when I left home. In addition, despite having a terrific pair of hiking shoes, I packed only [drumroll] my walking shoes.

We hiked out to one of Ian's favorite spots: the *spectacular* **Ernst Tinaja**. The rock we were on sloped about 30 degrees before it dropped off to the beautiful tinaja about 30 feet below. To get the best view of the tinaja, you had to walk to the edge of the cliff. Sandra, the official safety officer, warned that was a bad idea.

Almost to the edge where I could see it, my smooth-soled walking shoes slipped on small pebbles. With each uncontrolled, increasingly fast step, the others watched frozen in horror. Just as I imagined Fred Sanford saying, "Elizabeth, I'm coming honey!", survival instinct kicked in inches from the cliff, and I made myself fall to the side. **Note to self: PACK THE PROPER [EXPLETIVE] SHOES NEXT TIME!!**

As we drove across the country, it was surprising how dead rural towns were. The only sign of movement seemed to be the waving vertical banners outside vape shops and gun and ammo stores. This may explain a lot.

Despite the travails of getting through the learning curve, seeing beautiful places, meeting new people and reuniting with old friends like you feels like honouring Charles Dickens's Christmas in our hearts and keeping it all the year.



I thought I told you, "No elbows on the table."



Boquillas Canyon, in filthy pants



Claudia





Ian's mom Roberta turns 99!



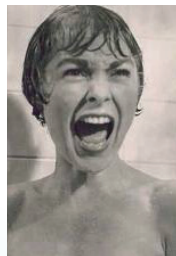
Turquoise (really!) Diablo Lake in the North Cascades



Erik Goodman and Ian went backpacking in Big Bend this month



Barbara!



In Big Bend with no hiking shoes!



Burton's yard



Burton and Talula

Here's **wishing you a jolly 2022**
full of **adventure**, **GOOD HEALTH**
and lots of **applause**.

love,
the Inglishes

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Click this link
for a New
Year's toast.

