

2003 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

AT YEAR'S END 2003

Little things are big things at this time in life. During the year now passing into the record book, we enjoyed visits from: Mary Lou's brother, Keith and his wife Christine; John's sister, Elizabeth and her husband Ken; and from nephews, Tom Faupel and Vern Brown with their families, who were able to spend some time at our cottage on Douglas Lake.

Then there were visits from a former college roommate, from colleagues on the immigration and language questions from as far away as Australia, and from a Dutch exchange student we knew from the 1960s. It is great to have time to sit and chat, and compare notes.

In February, we had an unexpected "snow day" a big dump of snow that shut everything down and gave us an unexpected day of leisure. Another day, we enjoyed a first-ever afternoon movie at the theater – our parents and grandparents would be shocked!

John took a course on the chemistry of chocolate and Mary Lou on world religions at our local community college. We both enjoyed the wintertime pruning the lower limbs of our pine trees and hemlocks. For Mary Lou's 68th birthday, John learned once again the three most important words in a marriage (see the end of this letter for the answer).

We both appreciate Petoskey, a town of walkable scale. Once the car is parked, you can get virtually anywhere on foot. Nice! We've also enjoyed little things such as an occasional sauna, spectacular sunsets, Red River cooked cereal on Sunday mornings, and the birdfeeder outside our kitchen window, with its attendant squirrels. Ah, yes, we should also mention the glass-fronted woodstove that allows one to watch the fire, and the rocking chair essential to this time-honored activity!

TRAVEL ... A recurring question is whether one should visit some new place, or return to old and familiar haunts (or both). The latter approach took us back to the Chiricahua Mountains in southeastern Arizona, just west of the town of Portal, if you care to look it up on the map. The American Museum of Natural History field station is there, where one can rent a cabin and take meals in a cafeteria. The mountains reach nearly 10,000 feet, so there is snow on top, and desert at the bottom. It is a great place for hiking and bird watching; humming birds in particular. We try to go in April every second year. Join us! While in the area, we visited former medical colleagues. We also returned to Mary Lou's hometown of Jonesville, Michigan, for her fiftieth high school reunion, which was great fun. A remarkable percentage of those folks are still on the scene.

We had a ProENGLISH board meeting in Tahoe, California, which provided an opportunity for a bit of mountain hiking.

In the category of "virtual" travel – since there are many places which we will never visit – we restored our oldest book, *Travels in Asia Minor in Greece or An Account of a Tour Made at the Expense of the Society of Dilettanti*, published in 1817. We have visited Greece, but never Asia Minor, so we decided to let the author guide our tour there. The restoration was done at the Bentley Historical

Library in Ann Arbor, and included find new covers, resewing of the pages, etc. We hope it will become a family heirloom.

OUTDOORS ... One reason we settled in Petoskey was to be "far from the maddening crowd." It is a lot more crowded here than when we arrived in 1964, to find only one traffic light and telephone numbers with just five digits. Thanks to nearly one-third of this country being in public ownership in state forests, in local conservancy preserves, or ownership by the Michigan Biological Station, it is still possible to get away by one's self in the woods. The three-thousand mile long North Country Trail, which begins in New Your State and ends in North Dakota, runs right through our county. It provides many fine hiking opportunities. We trekked along a number of them this year, sometimes by ourselves, sometimes with friends and guests. We have pretty much given up downhill skiing, but still enjoy snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. The fall mushrooms were good this year, yielding many meadow mushrooms; the white button mushroom one that we all commonly buy in the store. There was time for botanizing in the bogs and fens of the eastern Upper Peninsula. A good blackberry crop this year was free for the taking. John helped conduct a tour at the Sturgeon Bay sand dunes southwest of Mackinaw City, which a number of people worked to preserve over a twenty-five year period. A land use planning meeting provided the opportunity to meet Nina Leopold Bradley, daughter of Aldo Leopold, the noted writer of *Sand County Almanac*. That was a treat.

We highly recommend the movie, *Winged Migration*, to et a bird's eye view of our planet. Remarkable cinematography, much of it from ultra-light planes flying right alongside the birds. We enjoy sand hill cranes, which fly over our area in the spring and fall, and geese, even though they are increasing to nuisance proportions. Question number 2: Why is it that in the geese "V" flight pattern, one arm is longer than the other? See the end of this letter for the astounding answer.

DOUGLAS LAKE ... Douglas Lake is a half-hour north of Petoskey. It is the site for the University of Michigan Biological Station, the oldest freshwater biological station in the world. It owns 10,000 acres of undeveloped land. In 1999, we bought a cottage on the lake, just several doors from the station's property – a great place for hiking. The station has long been a big part of our lives. Last June, we took a five-day forest ecology course there, taught by one of the most prominent professor in this field. Many good lectures are held at the station, including James Watson, of Watson and Crick DNA fame. It was the fiftieth anniversary of their discovery of the double helical structure of the human chromosome.

We close our cottage for the winter, draining the pipes, but still go up for one long winter weekend. We haul in water, and fire up the woodstove. After a number of hours, it is possible to get the temperature up to 60 or so! Good fun – and completely quiet at night. It's fun to watch the light coming through chinks in the stove and playing on the ceiling.

BEES ... Despite all of the troubles plaguing bees these days, such as mites and various bacterial diseases, our bees came through the winter in good shape. When we finally removed their insulation in mid June, they were in strong condition, and favored us with a 900-pound crop this year. That's intermediate between our best crop (2,200-pounds) and our worst (0). Our annual part for extracting the honey from the combs was the last weekend in August. Over a hundred people came to help out and get a sample of the product. We continue to enjoy the glass-walled demonstration hive inn our kitchen – come see it sometime! The bees have access to the outside through a hole we drilled in the wall. It is fun and instructive to watch the queen reign over her workers.

THE GARDEN ... There seem to be new weeds and insect pests in the garden this year. I'm not sure what this means, but gardening is more challenging than in years past. But we enjoyed a bountiful raspberry crop, and had a great peach crop from a single tree, whose limbs we had to prop up, because they were so heavy-laden. The grapes yielded well, and ended up as jam. We had

adequate rain this summer (one reason for the good honey crop, and for all the vegetable garden crops as well.)

COMMUNITY LIFE ... We continue to enjoy benefits from our discussion and reading groups. The Second Saturday Salon meets in the morning every month and covers a wide variety of topics. In one form or another, this had gone on for about twenty-five years now. We both have a breakfast discussion group that meets once a week. We have attended these for nearly thirty years. A community reading group got started last year; everybody reads the same book each quarter, and then gets together to discuss it. Among this year's books: *Seabiscuit* and *Nick Adams Stories* by Hemingway, who spent his summers in our area. There is also a Great Books group that meets at noon twice a month to discuss a book we've all read. We are also fortunate to have nearby Bay View, a summer colony of Methodist origin. It brings much fine music and drama during its eight-week session.

FAMILY ... Our daughter Laura, her husband John, and their daughter Olivia live in Coconut Grove, Florida. It is a long distance away, but we are able to get together here or there two or three times a year. It is fund to watch Olivia (three years and three months) develop. Laura is fortunate to be able to stay home with their daughter.

Daughter Jane and her husband Hugh live in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Hugh is an engineer for GM. Jane is working as "supply coordinator" for the operating room at University of Michigan Hospital. Hugh's dad, Walter Thomson, passed away suddenly. He will be greatly missed. He was just 78. He was one of Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation," having served in the Merchant Marine during World War II. We enjoyed some good, long conversations with him about his adventures at sea.

ISSUES ... John continues to work on the immigration and language issues, both of which are coming to the fore, hopefully for some definitive resolution. If you'd like some more information on these efforts, you can visit these websites: www.thesocialcontract.com and www.proenglish.org.

Mary Lou continues to put a lot of effort into Scenic Michigan (www.scenicmichigan.org), and its campaign to limit new billboards in the state, and perhaps even remove some of the non-conforming ones. Mary Lou's other big project deals with outdoor lighting, especially in our home county of Emmet. The effort is to avoid spilling waste light into the night sky, obliterating the stars, and to make lighting more efficient and safer for drivers by avoiding glare. John is spending a lot of time trying to learn something about energy, which promises to be the "next big thing." In October, John sponsored for the twenty-seventh time, the Writers' Workshop. It is a conclave of the immigration and language reform movements that meets once a year. John was honored this year to be invited to address the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center's annual post-graduate meeting on the topic of doctors making a life for themselves outside of medicine. That was good fund, though quite challenging.

THINGS MEDICAL ... John retired from medicine in June of 1998, but nonetheless decided to keep current his license to practice medicine. Sentimentality, perhaps, but he doesn't see himself ever going tack into practice. Keeping the license up requires fifty hours of post-graduate medical education per year, which take some planning to achieve. It helps keep the mind active.

Our local hospital is famous now in medical circles for having the longest-standing nurses strike in U.S. history – over one year. The nurses selected the Teamsters as their bargaining agent. No end is in sight. It is a 15-minute walk from the U.S. foundation office to the hospital, so John often goes over for lunch to get a bit of exercise and keep in touch with former colleagues. It is a nice association.

RADIO/TV/BOOKS ... Perhaps our favorite TV program (after the weather channel!) is the British Prime Minister's weekly question/answer session in Parliament. It is carried on C-SPAN. These are remarkably challenging and pointed session. On the radio, we enjoy "Car Talk," if for no other reason than to hear the infectious laughter of the Tappet brothers. We are still devotees of "The Prairie Home Companion." For sheet slap stick, we enjoy the "Red Green Show" on PBC. Our book recommendation this year is Barbara Tuchman's *Practicing History*, which our Great Books group read. Later this year, the Community Reading Program is undertaking *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* by Michael Hart. We've recommended this in the past; it is still one of our favorites.

We hope this letter finds you well and active, and looking forward to 2004.

Answers to the puzzlers:

- The three most important words in a marriage are not "I love you," but, "Let's eat out!"
- Why is one limb of the "V" formation of a flight of geese loner than the other? There are more geese on that side.