

## 1990 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

### LOOKING BACK ON 1990

The highlight of our year was a long awaited trip to New Zealand and Australia. We stopped in New Zealand first, flying into Auckland for a three week stay, one on the north island and two on the south. We headed north first to see the kauri trees, a conifer of enormous girth. The north is also the stronghold of the Maoris, the original people of New Zealand. A full-fledged drive towards biculturalism and bilingualism was in progress. We felt right at home! We visited a local beekeeper, a kiwi plantation, saw wild turkeys introduced from the United States, and acre upon acre of gorse, a pretty but pestiferous thorny shrub transplanted from Scotland by the sheep men. Of the sheep, there are a great many, about twenty times the three million human inhabitants.

We then ferried to the south island and toured the mountainous west coast with our rented camper, hiking a lot, indulging our interest in botany, and reading aloud in the evenings. We hiked the Milford Track at the southwest end, and were favored with unusually good weather and fine views (it's usually very rainy). We stayed in bunk houses each evening, with meals and bedding provided -- pretty easy hiking! In our estimation the Track lived up to its reputation as one of the world's fine hiking experiences. The Track ends at the remote Tasman Sea, which we saw in one of its wilder moods. Later we had the thrill of seeing the albatross colony at Dunedin -- what magnificent fliers! They go to sea for years at a time, without ever landing.

We ended up in Christ Church on the south island of New Zealand, where we had a chance to visit the Antarctic museum, and see many artifacts of expeditions to the South Pole. Later in the year we chanced to be in Brunswick, Maine and visited the Arctic Museum at Bowdoin College. So in the one year we had a chance to visit the antipodes by proxy.

We then moved on to Melbourne, Australia for the medical meeting which provided the excuse for this whole trip. We were struck by the large foreign born population. Melbourne is second in the size of its Greek population only to Athens! (Auckland, New Zealand has the largest Polynesian population of any city in the World.) In Melbourne we picked up our main prize on the trip: a 20 volume International Library of Famous Literature, which we bought off the library shelves of the lobby of the hotel in which we stayed. It was published in London in 1900, and is full of treasures for nighttime reading around the fire.

We then flew north to Cairns, hoping to see the Great Barrier Reef. However a cyclone came through, so the reef was closed during the entire time we were there. We nonetheless had a fine time inland, going on expeditions with some first rate zoologists to see the likes of flying foxes, and to shine possums (of which there are many varieties) in the trees at night. We saw wallabies, tree kangaroos, enormous fig trees, and rattan in its native setting. We even visited a tea plantation. (Tea, it turns out, is of the camellia genus, the same as the flower of that name.) Annual rainfall on the plantation: 180 inches! Coming home we flew nonstop in a 747 from Sidney to Los Angeles. Our plane had over 400,000 pounds -- 200 tons -- of fuel on board when it took off!

While we were in Australia, their Federal election campaigns were going on. Immigration was a big issue, especially concerning a Japanese proposal to build a Japanese enclave in southeast Australia. There was plenty of conflict there too, along ethnic and language lines between the Aborigines and newer Australians. We made contact with the Australian immigration reform movement, and were generally fascinated and instructed to see how similar the problems in these two countries were to our own. There is lots more, but space is limited here. I have a 38 page diary I would be glad to loan to you if you are thinking about a trip Down Under. We would like to go again.

Mary Lou and I have continued our active interest in public affairs. I still spend the most time with FAIR -- the Federation for American Immigration Reform. Throughout 1989 and 1990 we worked to defeat a new immigration bill which would dramatically increase immigration to about one million per year. We finally lost this battle this October on the last day of the legislative session. During the year FAIR began recording the oral histories of its founding members. It was quite an experience to be interviewed in this way, reliving one's past and ideas before a microphone.

We continue to work on the official English question, and followed with great interest the constitutional crisis in Canada over language, and the proposals to admit Puerto Rico to the Union without confronting the far reaching language questions that this poses. Both the immigration and language questions are related to our long standing interest in the problems presented by continued human population growth.

Mary Lou was re-appointed to the Emmet County Planning Commission and has spent a great deal of time on outdoor sign control and lighting ordinances, the latter designed to control light "pollution" of the night sky. This is admittedly a personal interest, as we both like to follow the whirling of the heavenly spheres. (The Abrams Planetarium at Michigan State University sells excellent monthly sky charts, if you share this interest.)

Mary Lou also spent a good deal of time working on local alcohol and drug problems, helping to organize for the third year a series of six lectures on these topics. For a long list of reasons, we both gave up alcohol three years ago, and can report, all the ads notwithstanding, that it is possible to lead a pleasant life without that expense.

Early in the year a number of friends nominated me for one of the national Chevron Conservation Awards, based mainly for the part I had played in helping to set up our local land trust. I was selected to receive one. So we made a family affair out of the award ceremony in Washington: both of our girls came to town, as did my mother. It was a memorable evening, much appreciated. The trip had its down side, however. We went for a hike afterwards in Maryland, and Mary Lou was bitten by a deer tick -- and came down with Lyme disease. It took about five weeks to figure out what was going on, since the disease does not occur here in Northern Michigan (yet), but with intensive antibiotic treatment, she has recovered. She was feeling pretty miserable.

Yes, I still practice ophthalmology, but not quite full time. For seven years now, Mary Lou has worked with me one day a week on the rehabilitation of low vision (partially sighted) patients. This is the last frontier in ophthalmology, and I have ended up National Chairman of the committee that is trying to promote the concept. We put a fair amount of time into this, with meetings in San Francisco, Chicago, and Atlanta. The absolutely astounding changes that continue to take place

in cataract surgery also keep me jumping: ultrasound, used both to remove the cataracts themselves and to determine the length of the eye, information which is then fed into a computer to calculate the power of lens implant needed to give the desired postoperative refractive error; various forms of lasers used post operatively on cataract patients and elsewhere in ophthalmology.

Books, conversation and wrestling with ideas seem to be playing a larger role in our lives. For ten years we have both taken part in weekly 7:00 a.m. discussion groups at the Presbyterian Church we attend. We cover a very wide variety of topics, ranging from the sacred to the secular. For about five years we have belonged to a Great Books Group that meets about ten times a year. This has given us a chance to become acquainted with many famous works we previously knew only by name. This year we watched Bill Moyer's interviews of Joseph Campbell titled, "The Power of Myth" and learned a lot from this series. I am still in the process of trying to revive my German, and am part of a biweekly group that meets for lunch to read and converse in that language. I subscribe to a weekly German language newspaper, which, with all of the events going on in that country, has been fascinating reading.

Two other projects deserve mention. The first was an oral history I was privileged to record on my friend Wesley Maurer, who at 92 is still active as the editor of two weekly newspapers in this area. Wes has had a long and fascinating career as a liberal (in the classic sense of the word), as a journalist, and finally as professor of journalism at the University of Michigan. Through all of this he has displayed optimism and a vibrant love of life, as exemplified by the greenhouse he is now building at an age when most men don't even buy green bananas!

The second project is an all consuming one. I have started to edit and publish a new journal called *The Social Contract*. It covers the whole range of population, immigration, language, assimilation, and rights and responsibility issues in which we have been interested in for years. My associate editor -- the one who bears the brunt of the work -- is Robert Kyser, recently retired as minister of the Presbyterian Church we attend, and a person with whom we have been simpatico on these issues for fifteen years. This project is a great challenge and a great deal of work -- but very rewarding at this "summing up" time of life.

Around home our agricultural background continues to show through. We had the best year ever with our bees, just getting over 2,100 pounds of honey from our ten hives. We have honey stacked everywhere, even after giving half a ton of it away to the Boy Scouts and others. We still have a (too big) garden which is really coming into fine shape after twenty years of working in leaves, grass clippings, and planting rye in the fall. The asparagus bed we started 25 years ago is in its prime, and, when we eat it, helps reassure us that our kidneys are still working! We pulled out our two underground fuel tanks this year - before they started to leak. That's a big problem around here, where LUST stands for Leaking Underground Storage Tanks.

One cloud on our local horizon that especially concerns us: a proposal for a highway to bypass Petoskey, which would probably go within a half mile of our place, shattering the quiet and lighting up the night time sky. We are understandably not too excited about this prospect, and so we will be spending time over the next several years exploring alternatives. Mary Lou is at a township board meeting as I write.

Mary Lou and I both find ourselves seated with greater frequency at my grandmother's old upright piano. Music is become more important to us as the years go by.

Laurie and Jane are still single. Laurie is teaching in a bilingual classroom in Los Angeles, a wonderful irony considering my years of work on the language question. She still loves to travel, and recently took a courier flight to Hong Kong and Guangzhou (Canton) to visit friends made during the year she spent living out in that part of the world. Jane is a scrub nurse in the operating room at University Hospital in Ann Arbor, and the new and proud owner of a house (which is not net)! The mortgage is manageable thanks to two rooms she is renting out to friends. My mother, the only one of our parents that is still with us, remains in good shape at 82. She still lives alone in the 16-room house on the family farm in the Thumb of Michigan, and is able to drive up here for a visit now and again.

Mary Lou and I are both past the 55 mark, a good time to pause to take stock, and try to figure out how we want to spend our time as we head into the home stretch. We find ourselves thinking more about the plan that the famous horticulturist Liberty Hyde Bailey made for himself early in life: "25 years for training; 25 years for service, which is to say the practice of my vocation: and the remainder for doing the things which interest me most." Bailey followed his plan quite closely except that he lived to be 96 rather than 75! E. B. White, of *Charlotte's Web* fame, put it with a bit more flare: "If the world were merely seductive that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But arise in the morning, torn between a desire to save the world and a desire to savor the world. That makes it hard to plan the day!" We would like to savor the world a bit more - will we be able to pull it off?

In the meantime, we are disposed to give thanks for the health that has allowed us to pursue all of these activities, minds beset with no more than the usual amount of doubts and misgivings, and good educations provided by the people of the Sate of Michigan who receded us, to whom we feel the need to repay a debt of gratitude by trying to pass something on to the next generation. And for being born in the country where all of this is possible.

We hope that you too can join us in looking beyond the troubles that we all have and count your blessing as we all pick up the challenges of 1991.

John                      Mary Lou