

1991 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

CHRISTMAS 1991

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.
"Walden," (1854), *Economy*, Thoreau, Henry David.

August 1 of this year was to be a day of desperation for us, but not of the quiet variety.

Mary Lou and I had traveled with our mountaineering companion, Jack Lockwood, to Darrington, Washington, about 100 miles northeast of Seattle. We had climbed there five years before with Jack, who was our companion on our walking trip along the high route from Chamonix, France, to Zermatt, Switzerland, in 1986. Jack and I climbed the Matterhorn together, and he has climbed for 20 years, so we have a fair amount of mountaineering experience.

On our previous trip to Darrington, we had just sampled the centerpiece mountain of that town, Whitehorse, which rises to about 6,500 feet immediately back of the town.

We had planned to spend three days up on the shoulder of the mountain, exploring and climbing. We set up our base camp on one of the few open areas on a saddle between two peaks. The first night we enjoyed fantastic views of Mt. Baker to the north and down on Darrington in the valley below.

The next morning, however, the weather had moved in. Nevertheless, we packed up and headed for the snow fields and glaciers above. By the time we arrived, visibility was down to several hundred feet.

We dressed in our warmest clothes, put on our crampons, roped up, and headed off across the glacier. Granite walls loomed up out of the fog. We were climbing over some very steep snow slopes, kicking steps as we went. We finally reached the top of the snow field. I stepped over a thin bridge of snow onto the rock cliff. Only after Mary Lou and Jack had joined me on the rock, were we able to look back and see the enormous gulf below between the snow field and the rock. Just a thin wisp of snow had extended out to the rock and made our passage possible.

We decided that climbing the last several hundred feet to the summit to be unwise, given the conditions. Now we were faced with getting back over this yawning chasm. The prescription was for me to go first, taking very small, quick, light steps in hopes that the snow bridge would hold - it did. Mary Lou followed, Jack right on her heels. Something happened - it's not clear what - and we fell. My safety anchor in the snow didn't hold, and off the three of us went, rolling

down the face of the glacier. I was tumbling head over heels. Then suddenly we stopped - Mary Lou had gotten in an ice ax arrest that stopped the three of us.

Once we had collected ourselves, we started down again trying to follow our tracks, which by this time were becoming faint, and realizing that the steepest snow was still ahead of us. Visibility was still not much to write home about. When we came to the steepest pitch on the climb - it must have been about a 50 degree slope - we had another fall. Fortunately, I saw this one coming and fell with my ice ax in the arrest position, and brought us all to a stop - gradually, it turned out, since we found ourselves in a small surface avalanche which slowly stopped. By this time, the worst of the route was behind us. We got back down to our starting point and off the glacier without further mishap. We took our ropes off, and headed off over rough country for our base camp, making resolutions about safety and traveling in poor weather as we went.

Now we were down on the lower reaches of the mountain, crossing alternate ridges of bare rock and valleys still filled with snow. Towards the top of one of these snow fields, which was perhaps 200 feet long, Jack broke through the snow, fell backwards, and lost his ice ax! He started sliding down the snow field, head first, on his backpack, toward the rock field below, and gathered speed fantastically. As he shot off the end of the snow field, probably at 30 miles per hour, his head caught a remaining rim of snow which tipped him so that he went into the rocks back first. Mary Lou and I both watched this in horror, compounded by the silence after Jack disappeared from view. We both ran down, expecting the worst.

Jack was conscious but dazed, and complaining of pain in his back and chest. Ice water was dripping on him from the snow above. It was 5:00 p.m., and we were on the back side of the mountain with at least a five-hour hike out for help.

We had to get Jack out of the cold and damp, and into some dry clothing. He had no broken limbs, and his nervous system seemed to be intact. So we gradually slid him out, managed to sit him up, got his wet clothes off and dry ones on. He was able to stand and walk slowly. What to do? We chose to move slowly toward the base camp, going as far as Jack was able as long as no complications developed. It took us about two hours to cover what had taken us about a halfhour coming out in the morning.

We arrived at about 7:00 p.m., got Jack into a tent, gave him some liquids and food, after which, with pain medication, he was halfway comfortable. By this time, it was 7:30, and we decided that for me to go out at night might very well result in another casualty. Since Jack seemed stable, we decided to stay the night, with me going out first thing in the morning for help.

The rest of the story can be abbreviated. The Army has a search and rescue team in this area, and they flew in with one of the Huey helicopters. They let a corpsman down a wire, and he and Mary Lou got Jack out of the tent and onto a backboard, and all of the camping gear knocked down and out of the way. After this, the helicopter landed. We were fortunate to have picked as our camping site the only place in the area where a helicopter could have landed. Jack and Mary Lou then flew off to the General Hospital in Everett, Washington, where x-rays showed that Jack had broken his third lumbar vertebra. He had narrowed his spinal canal, through which the spinal nerves run, by 30%.

Three months later, Jack is making a good recovery, having spent much of the intervening time in bed or in a clam-shell body brace.

Mary Lou and I still had a week left on our vacation after we got Jack settled in the hospital, so we went back into the Glacier Peak wilderness area but at lower and safer elevations.

The message we took from all of this is not that we should no longer enjoy the freedom of the hills, but that, in our late 50s, different rules should apply. We've drawn up a good-sized list of these, and intend to follow them.

After this "Cascade escapade," the rest of the year seems fairly humdrum by comparison. I continue to work on the immigration policy question with the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a group I helped found 13 years ago. Immigration policy promises to be on the front burner all across the globe in the 1990s.

In this connection, our new quarterly publication, *The Social Contract*, survived its first year, and seems to be filling the need for a journal in this contentious field.

Mary Lou continues to serve on our local county planning commission. The two of us work together to provide low vision rehabilitation services in my ophthalmology practice, at which I work about three-quarters time, as I have for a number of years. I'm national chairman for the American Academy of Ophthalmology's Low Vision Rehabilitation Committee that's trying to promote the concept of rehabilitation for visually impaired patients. We seem to be making some headway.

Our self-improvement project for the year was to purchase a nearly new Kawai baby grand piano to replace my grandmother's failing upright. I've gone back to taking piano lessons for the fourth time in my life, and Mary Lou, who is a good pianist, is also spending more time at the keyboard. We find this brings a good deal of satisfaction at this point in our lives.

We try to keep our balance through all of this activity by staying fairly close to nature. Our garden did well this year. We had the best tomatoes ever, and we had a fine, late crop of kohlrabi that we're still enjoying. We grew bok choy for the first time, and found that this cabbage-family plant does well in our climate and in the stir fry. The apple crop was also prime this year, and we spent several evenings putting up apple sauce and apple butter.

In June, Mary Lou and I took a one-week entomology course at the University of Michigan Biology Station, 20 miles north of here, and enjoyed learning something about that largest portion of the animal kingdom. A quarter of all the species of animals in the world are beetles!

In September, a wonderful storm blew through the area, just at dusk. The lightning and thunder were incredible, accompanied by heavy rain. That, and the annual appearance of the Andromeda constellation in late summer, helped keep things in perspective. Andromeda is the most distant naked-eye object in the sky. According to Fred Hubble, of telescope fame, the galaxy is 200,000 light years in diameter, and 2,000,000 light years distant. That's a good background against which to judge the import of today's news.

In October, we took a few days before a medical meeting in Los Angeles to tour Oregon, which we had never visited before. Our oldest daughter, Laura, who is teaching in the year-round school system in L.A., happened to be off at this time, and so joined us. We had spectacular weather, and a fine time traveling around Mt. Hood, down the east side of the Cascades to Bend and Ashland, with a detour to Crater Lake. After visiting the northern California redwoods at Jedediah Smith Redwood State Park, we worked our way up the coast, with detours inland to Eugene and Corvallis.

Our daughter Jane is now a circulating and scrub nurse in the plastic surgery unit at University Hospital in Ann Arbor. She spends much of her spare time fixing up the "starter" home she purchased last summer.

We hope there **was** a pot of gold at the end of your rainbow this year - as there was at the end of ours. Those white boxes in the photo are our beehives which again this year, for the 27th year in a row, yielded a golden harvest of about 1,000 pounds of honey.

We look forward to the challenges of 1992 and hope your year has been a satisfying one, and that you have enjoyed some peace and serenity amongst all of life's activities.

Mary Lou + [Signature]