

## 1992 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

### *CHRISTMAS* 1992

We'll start off with a sequel to last year's letter, in which we recounted our ill-fated climbing expedition in the Cascades, where our climbing partner, Jack Lockwood, fell and broke his back. After spending about a month in the hospital in Everett, Washington, Jack flew home to Gladstone, in Michigan's upper peninsula. That in itself was an interesting - and expensive - venture: several seats were taken out of a commercial airliner, and his gurney was wheeled right onto the plane and strapped to the wall. After about six months in a body brace, his healing is complete - without any neurologic loss - and he's now back to running. He even went back out to the Cascades this past summer for another hiking trip! We passed this year, but hope to go back next summer ... with a guide.

On the public interest front, we continue to work with the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) which John helped organize back in 1979. After thirteen years, the organization continues to grow and has become one of the main players in the developing immigration debate.

That debate took a giant step forward this year with seminal cover articles in the *National Review* (June 22, 1992) on the conservative side, and in *The Atlantic* magazine (October, 1992) on the liberal side.

During the year, we had visits in Petoskey from immigration reformers from Europe and Australia. John spoke at the Pundits Club in Palm Beach in February, hosted two meetings of the Writers' Workshop, a collection of people who write on population, immigration, and assimilation topics, and attended the first reunion of the Mitchell Prize Winners in Houston, Texas. It was winning one of these prizes back in 1975 that provided the impetus to launch FAIR. John also attended a conference on the management of non-profit organizations, hosted by the famed management consultant Peter Drucker, now an octogenarian. It was fun to see him in action.

In the course of the year, John helped launch a new public-interest organization, E Pluribus Unum, with long-time associate and former U.S. ENGLISH executive director Gerda Bikales at its head. Our concerns are about the social and cultural fragmentation of our country. We are, of course, anxious to see how the change of administrations will affect this key topic and all the others that interest us.

On the natural history front, we bought a quarter section of land in the "Chandler Hills," about eight miles southeast of our home. It's about 80 percent forested with second-growth timber, and includes a 30-acre red pine plantation. The tract is almost completely surrounded by state land, and is undeveloped - we plan to keep it that way. Chandler Hill is famous morel mushroom country, so we will be trying our luck out there this spring.

On a more ominous note, a mite that is parasitic on bees has now arrived in our area. Elsewhere in the U.S., it has proved v destructive. What the long-term prospects for beekeeping are remain to be seen - not to mention the prospects for agricultural crops that require pollination. But this year, we had a fine honey crop, gathering in more than 2,000 pounds from our eleven hives.

Though the summer was cool, the garden still did quite well, especially our new raspberry patch. Our peach tree produced for the first time. We had a terrific fall "eating" season, with all our home-grown veggies.

This summer a new orchid appeared in our woods (the hellebore, *Epipactis helleborine*). It turned out to be a European import, one which is spreading rapidly all over this part of Michigan. The appearance of exotic plants and animals is becoming a big problem all across the globe, as trade and travel pick up, and as the physical barriers that used to isolate species are breaking down. Unlike this orchid, which is rather pretty, many of these are bad actors. The *National Geographic* magazine has carried brief stories on some of them: the Asiatic gypsy moth (July, 1992), now established on the West Coast; the brown snakes that invaded Guam from Southeast Asia (20-30,000 per square mile now) (July, 1992); the new five-inch-long grasshopper that has appeared in Florida from South America (November, 1992); and the mile-a-minute weed that now sprawls over Pennsylvania and has invaded Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, West Virginia, Virginia, and the District of Columbia (October, 1992). We will be hearing more about this type of problem in the future. All of these introduced species are reducing the productive capacity of our land ... not a helpful trend with our population growing by more than 3 million per year.

In September, we took a trip north of Sault Ste. Marie, Canada to look for ferns, and had good success. We had both taken the ferns course at the University of Michigan Biological Station several years ago, so this was a real treat. Earlier in the year during a trip to Carmel, California, John had a chance to hike into a remote valley to see some of the few remaining redwoods in that part of the state. Seeing such trees is always good for clarifying one's thinking on just how important we are in the overall scheme of things.

During the summer, we had a celebration at the U of M Biological Station of the final passage into state ownership of the Sturgeon Bay Dunes, located about thirty miles north of Petoskey. A number of us had worked for about twenty-five years to finally bring this about. This completes a stretch of about six miles of shoreline, which is now in public ownership and thus will not be developed.

But perhaps the natural history highlight of this year was a wonderful July 12, when we had a long, warm, gentle rain. We put on our slickers and went for a walk in the woods - just like being a child once again!

On the reading and writing front, the load seems to grow apace. The journal John edits, *The Social Contract*, marked its second year, and one of his editorials ended up as an op-ed piece in *The Christian Science Monitor* - copy enclosed. The journal has been a lot of work, but it's very satisfying, and judging from comments we receive, it apparently is of use to others in the field.

Mary Lou continues her work on the Emmet County Planning Commission, and has developed an interest in signs, lighting, billboards, and roads in particular. Her work was the subject of an editorial in our Michigan environmental newspaper, *The Northwoods Call* - copy enclosed.

Our Great Books group is still running - over the last five years, we have just about completed all five series of texts. We have been introduced to many works that we would never have encountered otherwise, and feel better for the effort. If you'd like more information on this program, or anything else mentioned herein, drop us a note.

We each continue our weekly 7:00 a.m. breakfast discussions with eight to twelve friends, which have now gone on for more than a decade. These are one of our highlights each week.

Early in the year, John struck up an arrangement with a Ph.D. historian, Wayne Lutton, to coauthor a book on immigration history and policy. This project is well along, and we hope to have the book published in 1993. Wayne is also *very* knowledgeable about classical music, and has taught us a good deal on this score. John finds himself ever more frequently drawn toward the piano bench, and is actually getting to the point where he can play a few things and understand a bit of music theory.

On the medical front, John completed his stint as chairman of the Low Vision Rehabilitation Committee of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. We still work together one day a week at Burns Clinic to provide low vision services to those who have to make do with partial sight. Chances are, we will continue to do this for many years to come, after I finally give up surgery. There's virtually no medical liability in this type of work, and it provides a great deal of satisfaction.

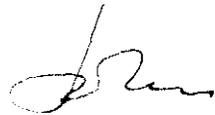
Medicine is changing a great deal. We spend a lot more time now with paperwork and committee meetings (often starting at 6:45 a.m. or running till 10:00 p.m.), and every so often get another batch of pages from the Federal Register with a fresh set of rules with which to comply. The constant worry about being hit with a six to seven-figure law suit is real.

The wanderlust again struck our eldest daughter Laura, and she's now back in Hong Kong, teaching English and drama in the Singapore International School. Jane is a scrub nurse in the plastic surgery room at University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, and spends her spare time fixing up the house she bought several years ago. Mother Tanton is in fine fettle at 84, and still lives by herself in the big family farm house. She drives her own car, and still exchanges visits with us on occasion.

It's not all frenetic activity. Our thirty-fourth wedding anniversary on June 15 fell on a wonderful warm summer day. We took the day off, and in the morning just sat in the sun on the east side of our home, listening to the birds on the hillside. We had been hearing the yellow-throat warblers there all spring, and took the time to track one of the elusive birds down. What a spectacular sight and song!

We will both be 60 before too long, so one's thoughts turn to how to spend the remaining years. Three of John's contemporaries from residency days had open-heart surgery this past year, so that helps to sharpen the focus. Among other things, we have decided to not put off any longer some of the trips we've been wanting to take. If all goes well, we'll travel to New Zealand and Australia next spring, places we enjoyed visiting so much in 1990.

We hope this greeting finds you well, that you will have a pleasant holiday season, and that the new year will bring you just the right amount of challenge to keep you on your toes!



P.S. The photograph was taken at Wilderness State Park, at the tip of the lower peninsula of Michigan, dose to the Sturgeon Bay beach location. You can just barely see the Mackinac Bridge in the background.