

1994 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

Greetings during the Halcyon Days of 1994:

Humorist Garrison Keillor informed us recently during his *Writers' Almanac* program that the Halcyon Days are those a week on either side of the winter solstice, when the fabled Halcyon bird calms the winds and the seas for its nesting. We hope some of that calm reaches you as well, as we wait for the seasons to change and for the sun to again start its climb through the sky.

We enjoy hearing from others at this time of year especially about your travels, which we relive vicariously - so that means we need to respond in kind. Since we didn't get a letter written last year, and as we have had some nice journeys, we'll back up and cover both 1993 and 1994.

Mary Lou and I started off in March and April, 1993, with a return trip to New Zealand and Australia, which we had visited in the spring of 1990. In New Zealand, we kept to the South Island, spending time around Mt. Cook (the highest point at about 12,000 feet), and then driving down to the southern Alps around Queenstown. There we took a week's hike on two of the Kiwi's famous "tracks" (hiking trails): the Routeburn and Caples tracks. We stayed in hikers' huts along the way, and carried all of our food and other gear, enjoying nice people, fine country, and a first rate experience. We had only one day of heavy rain, and we holed up in one of the huts, as we had planned an extra day in our itinerary to cover this eventuality. We worked our way back to Christchurch along the rugged west coast. New Zealand reminds us of the United States in the 1960s: inexpensive and sparsely developed. Nice!

We then flew off to Sydney, Australia, where our older daughter Laura joined us, coming down from Hong Kong, where she was teaching school. We drove south to the capitol city of Canberra, joined up with friends there from the Australian immigration reform movement, and immediately took off for a five-day hike through the Kosciusko Mountains, the highest in Australia with heights up to 7000 feet. Approximately equal in area to Switzerland, this area is snow-covered in the wintertime. About 15 of us were on the hike, led by an 80-year-old mountain man cum poet with whom we could barely keep up! We stayed along the way in what used to be herders' huts. It was a fine and exciting time, especially for one member of the party, who got lost late in the day and spent a (fortunately mild) night in the open. We retraced our footsteps the next morning and found him; he had had the good sense to stay put and not wander off. If you'd like to see a video of this area, we highly recommend "The Man from Snowy River," which incidentally has some of the finest horse-riding scenes we have ever seen. There are still wild horses ("brumbies") in the area.

After some immigration meetings back in Canberra, we spent time at the 'Prom' (short for the Promontory) - a famous Aussie national park - the southernmost point on the continent, facing the island of Tasmania across the Bass Strait. In this year's family photo, the lower picture is of Laura at the Promontory, with the Tasman Sea in the background.

Thence to Melbourne with a detour of several days at a friend's country place to see the eucalyptus trees he planted a decade ago - they are already 100 feet tall! In Melbourne, there were more immigration meetings and talks, after which we spent a few days at the surfers' coast southwest of Melbourne, where another immigration reform friend had loaned us his cottage. No luck with the surfing, though we tried! On the way back to Sydney, we detoured through the dryer interior, sheep - and rabbit - country. Pretty desolate by our well-watered mid-western standards! But the stars at night are unbelievable, given the absence of competing man-made lights.

After a few days in Sydney, Laura headed off to the Malayan Peninsula to wend her way back to Hong Kong; she satisfied a long-time urge by spending 10 days in a Buddhist monastery!

Mary Lou and I flew on to Fiji. We picked that South Sea island to visit because we wanted to see firsthand the immigration-induced conflicts there between the native Fijians and the Asiatic Indians, who were brought in by the British in the 1860s to cut sugar cane. The latter multiplied rapidly; by 1985, they had a majority and took over the Fijian Parliament. The army, still in Fijian hands, then overthrew the government and installed its own people, and changed the constitution to give the Fijians a permanent political majority, never mind the numbers. A tense situation. Any parallels for the USA?

On the flight back home, there were many Indians on board. They got off in Hawaii, and headed, we were told, for Vancouver, where a big Indian colony is growing. They've given up on Fiji and India.

During the summer of 1993, I headed out to Washington state's Mount Adams with my climbing companion, Jack Lockwood, the same chap who was injured while on a climb with us back in 1991. Since he has fully recovered, and we both love the mountains, so

The route we selected up the northwest spur proved, however, to be too much for us at our ages of roughly 60, so wisdom (and bad memories) won out over testosterone (now in shorter supply!). We retreated to our mountain meadow campsite to just enjoy the fields of lupine and the pristine mountain air and light. On the way home, we traveled past Mt. St. Helens, very much worth the visit to see the power of a volcano. We also went through Sitka in southeast Alaska for some deep sea fishing and hiking with my long-time friend and fellow naturalist, Bill Foster.

In November, I was invited to participate in an immigration conference in Bamberg, in Bavaria, in (west) Germany. It was put on by the European Forum for Migration Studies, a group in whose found I had played a minor role. One of the organizers loaned us his cabin in the nearby mountains. We had a fine time conferencing, hiking, and seeing the sights of the ancient city (founded c. 1000 A.D.), with its beautiful churches and castles. Mary Lou's 1955 exchange student friend, Berta Baumgartner, traveled by train from Berne, Switzerland, to join us for sightseeing and to visit for a few days. Side

trips took us to Nurnberg, and into the former East Germany to Weimer and Buchenwald. East is East and West is West - but here the twain have met, to paraphrase Kipling. What a difference!

In February, 1994, Mary Lou and I were invited to present at a low vision rehabilitation conference in Salt Lake City, pursuing our favorite medical topic. We took a side trip north and west to Promontory, Utah, where the eastern and western railroads came together and the Golden Spike was driven in 1869. It was great to see this bit of Americana, set in the midst of the fine open, rolling western country that we love so well. Both of the Promontories mentioned in this letter are well worth a visit.

In the spring of 1994, it was our younger daughter Jane's turn to go on a trip with us. She managed to get a month off from her scrub nurse job at University Hospital in Ann Arbor, and we headed for points south. The first stop was in Costa Rica, where we took in butterfly farms and coffee fincas (farms). We also visited active volcanoes, the jungle at the Nicaraguan border, and the marvelous cloud forest at Monte Verde, capping all this with a trip down to the beaches of Manuel Antonio. It was a fine 10 days.

Then on to Lima, Peru, and to Cuzco at 11,000 feet - we noticed the altitude. I'm not sure if the coca tea they served us as an antidote was much help! Mary Lou and Jane were besieged on the streets by the local women selling their handmade sweaters, and they made some nice buys. We toured the amazing Inca stoneworks in the Cuzco area, and then took the narrow gauge railroad (complete with switchbacks, where the train actually stops and backs up the mountain a way before going forward again) through the canyons to Machu Picchu, which had been discovered in 1911 by our friend David Bingham's grandfather, Hiram. This is where the upper of our two photographs was taken. The stoneworks here are truly astounding, considering the primitive tools with which the Incas had to work. From Peru, we flew north to Quito, Ecuador, (9,000 feet), having arranged a five-day tour down into the headwaters of the Amazon. We flew down to the jungle in a Hercules military transport plane, all fitted out for paratroopers. Our fellow passengers were mostly oil field workers. Once in the jungle, we traveled by dugout canoe, with an outboard motor. This was a particularly fine natural history trip: monkeys, birds galore, caimans (rather like an alligator), and interesting native people. We stayed at a biological field station. One feature: a three-foot long earthworm!

Back in Quito we spent a few days touring the highlands and native markets, and then went off for a long-anticipated trip of a lifetime: The Galapagos Islands! We had a particularly fine guide, and a small tour group of 12 on a nice ship. The boat moves between islands at night; one tours the islands by day. Great skies here, too, including sightings of the Southern Cross and the closest star to our sun, Alpha Centauri, "only" 4.3 light years away. We swam with the sea lions (wild life is very tame, having evolved with no men [hunters] around), watched sea turtles hatching saw the land tortoises, the eland and sea iguanas, and, most spectacularly, porpoises surfing in the bow wake of our boat. One night, while they were cavorting in this way, they were illuminated by bioluminescent plankton, sheathing them in a breathtaking fluorescent light. If you're interested in natural history, and ever have a chance to take this trip, do it!

That's a pretty taxing travel schedule, but Mary Lou and I are determined to see some of the things we've always wanted to while they're still there to be seen - and while we can still see them.

The last two weeks of July, 1994, a group of us that has canoed together for some 20 years took off for a raft trip on the wildest part of the North American continent: the Tatshenshini River, which starts in the Yukon Territories, flows into British Columbia, and ends up at the north end of Glacier Bay National Park. The river's rapids were fairly mild - but the country is spectacular, with glaciers calving right into the river on its lower reaches. At the end, we flew out in the workhorse of the north, an old DC-3. Getting into the river, we went through Skagway, location of the Chilkoot Pass, through which the gold rushers of '98 reached Alaska and the Yukon Territories. And in Whitehorse, I saw Sam McGee's cabin, immortalized by the bard of the north, Robert Service, in his "Cremation of Sam McGee."

Also in July, Mary Lou's 4th grade pen pal, Daphne Frankum, came from the Newcastle area of England for a month's visit, marking 50 years of correspondence. Daphne had lost her sight 45 years ago from tuberculous meningitis. We enjoyed the opportunity to "catch up" and discuss politics and music.

Immigration reform questions continue to occupy much of our time. A book of which I was the junior author, *The Immigration Invasion*, was published last spring. We printed 200,000 copies 185,000 of which are gone already. We will bring out an updated version in about one year, just in time for the 1996 Presidential campaign. Soon we will publish an English translation of *Camp of the Saints*, a controversial French novel about migration that was the subject of the cover article in the December *Atlantic Monthly* magazine. Our quarterly journal, *The Social Contract*, is in its fifth year, and has been well received. Our Washington editor's article on the Hmong immigration to Wausau, Wisconsin, which appeared in the April 1994 *Atlantic*, inspired a 14-minute segment on *60 Minutes* this past fall.

We have started a new organization called English Language Advocates (ELA) which espouses English as the common, unifying language for our country. You may have seen that the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals just declared that the Arizona Official English constitutional amendment, adopted by initiative, is unconstitutional! So, we now have our work cut out for us, if we're to avoid descending into the abyss of having a bi- (or multi-) lingual country. We have appealed the case. If you would like copies of any of the items mentioned here, let us know.

The practice of medicine is in an uproar these days, but Mary Lou and I plod ahead providing low vision rehabilitation services, and enjoying this "high touch" (not high tech) aspect of medicine. The clinic for which I have worked for 30 years has been sold (over my prostrate, if not dead, body) to a group of high-pressure number crunchers (PhyCor) who have figured out how to take a percentage off the operation. I also serve on our hospital's ethics committee. You wouldn't believe the cases we get - the complexities and hard decisions would, to quote Tevya in "Fiddler on the Roof," "cross a rabbi's eyes!" I can send you a sample of these if you are interested.

Closer to home, we still enjoy the vegetable and flower gardening. The asparagus patch we planted is now 25 years old and very productive. Two parasites - mites - have devastated the bee populations across the United States, and our bees were not spared. Half of our hives died during the winter of '93-94, and we got only a fractional honey crop this year. However, we have the bees built back up, and are anxious to see how well they'll survive this winter. We are going to try to manage our way through this new problem without resorting to mite-specific pesticides, as the commercial bee keepers are doing.

Our local environmental problems include a proposed by-pass that would put a concrete necklace around Petoskey - and would run within several hundred yards of our house. The inevitable Wal-Mart proposal has also surfaced. We are not enthusiastic about either of these, and are working actively on alternatives to both.

We look forward to 1995 with anticipation. There are certainly many problems, but, as the Chinese say, 'problem' is just another name for an 'opportunity'. We plan to work on a few of the problems, but also to live one day at a time and smell the roses all the way. We hope you will find it possible to do the same.

John and Mary Lou Tanton