

1998 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

CHRISTMAS 1998

This was a year of anniversaries for us to observe:

- Two-hundred years since the Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus wrote his famous essay, *On Population*,
- Forty years of marriage,
- Thirty-five years of doing intraocular surgery,
- Thirty years in the same house that we built in 1968 (that's an editorial "we!"),
- Twenty years since the founding of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR),
- Fifteen years since U.S.ENGLISH was launched, and since Mary Lou established the low-vision service as part of my ophthalmology practice,
- Five years since several of us refugees from U.S.ENGLISH set up English Language Advocates (ELA).

Malthus is on the list since his name has come to be synonymous with the human population question, on which we have spent so many years in one way or another. In recognition of the anniversary of the publication of his famous (or infamous, depending on one's point of view!) paper, we put out a special issue of our journal, *The Social Contract*, dedicated to a reassessment of his ideas after 200 years. I also presented a paper at a conference at Airlie House (located in the Virginia countryside southwest of Washington, D.C.) on the newly noticed phenomenon of sub-replacement fertility in the developed countries. Both of these projects involved a lot of rereading of Malthus and commentaries on him, his times and work, both pro and con, both modern and over the past 200 years. This proved a very enjoyable and educational exercise. For instance: Karl Marx, criticizing Malthus in the 1850s, was not amused! (But Marx liked Darwin; he asked him to write the foreword to *Das Capital* - Darwin declined.)

Another Significant Emotional Event for 1998 was my retirement after thirty-four years of practice of medicine at Burns Clinic Medical Center - the only place I ever practiced. I had the privilege of performing about 4,000 operations during that time, not a huge number as such things go, but a good-sized group nonetheless. I still enjoyed practicing medicine, and could likely have stayed around another five years or so until age 70, but for a variety of reasons it seemed the right time to go. One doesn't want to stay too long, and many folks who had worked until age 70 counseled me that they had not retired soon enough. With all of the turmoil in medicine these days, it was becoming much less pleasant than in the early years. Another change: in today's highly mobile society, it is rare to work at only one place for one's whole career.

Mary Lou, who had run the aforementioned Low-Vision Rehabilitation service at the Clinic for 14 years, retired from that post last year. She has continued her work on the Emmet County Planning Commission, on which she has served for 20 years. Her special interest is in lighting and trying to keep the night sky as dark as possible so the heavens can still be seen. Mary Lou's other big project has been the chairmanship of Scenic Michigan, the state chapter of Scenic America. Its emphasis is on trying to control

billboards. After helping to get the Michigan group started five years ago, and having served as its president in the interim, she has now recruited a successor. (We're both trying to downsize a bit!)

So we should have lots of free time, right? As everyone warned, it does not work that way. I had been working two days a week at U.S., the tax-deductible foundation out of which we run many of our projects. Somehow I now seem to be spending five days a week there, and still am not staying ahead of the flood. Work expands to fill the time available. I have passed off the editorship of *The Social Contract* to my associate, Wayne Lutton, and have completed my term as Chairman of FAIR, which should help free up some time.

Another of our U.S. projects, English Language Advocates (ELA), is in the building stage. This means much work needs to be done on its direct mail campaign. We also are defending a legal case challenging Arizona's official English initiative of 1988 ... we have it on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. We are hopeful the court will take it, as they did our similar case two years ago ... which we won 9-0.

I continue to serve on the FAIR and ELA Boards of Directors, and Mary Lou and I each make it to Washington, D.C. three or four times a year in connection with our various organizations and activities. On one of these forays, we took an extra day to enjoy the Air and Space Museum, and the National Gallery of Art - two of the places we had resolved to visit again when we had some extra time in retirement. (There's still a long list of other sights - and sites - to see.)

Our older daughter Laura completed her Master's degree in social work at University of Eastern North Carolina in Greenville this spring, so we drove down for her graduation ceremonies. Along the way, we stopped off at the home in Freemont, Ohio of the 19th President of the United States, Rutherford B. Hayes. Very interesting - he was a man of considerable learning. We also stopped at Johnstown, Pennsylvania, site of the famous 1889 flood that killed 2,200 people when a dam gave way (the explanatory museum is very well done), and at Frank Lloyd Wright's nearby architectural feat, Falling Water. We then enjoyed a drive on down the Skyline Drive, and visited friends that we hadn't seen in many years in western North Carolina - great fun. Having the time for such forays is one of the nice aspects of this time of life.

At Laura's graduation, we were pleased and proud when she got the award for the best Master's thesis. Then it was on to see the Biltmore Estate near Asheville, North Carolina, and finally back home through the Great Smoky Mountains. We stopped there to hike, as we had on two trips there in the early 1960s, back when Laura was an infant and still traveling in a backpack.

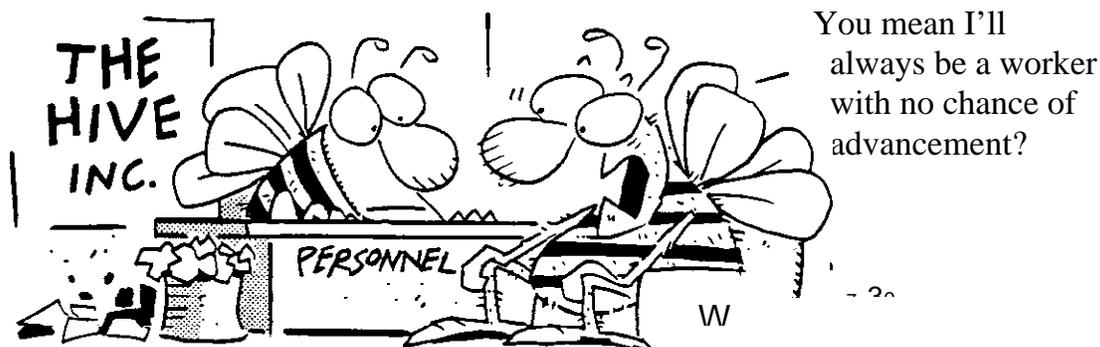
Back home, the very warm summer made for good gardening, and success with the eggplant and other warm-weather crops. Both of us still enjoy getting down and working in the dirt. As the old saying goes, you can take the boy (or girl) out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy (or girl)!

Another summertime retirement activity: I had the time to go back to the University of Michigan Biological Station (twenty miles north of here) and re-enroll in the field botany course that I had taken thirty-one years before. The same professor was teaching the course - as it turned out, for the last time, as he retired at the end of the session. I did my paper for the course on milkweeds, which are fascinating for their associations with honeybees (a good nectar source), monarch butterflies (the larva feed on the plant), and World War 11 (milkweed floss was used as a substitute for kapok in life jackets). Our home county of Emmet was the epicenter for collecting the

floss. The school kids and others collected 125,000 bags at 10 pounds per bag in the peak year of 1944 ... that's a lot of milkweed floss! A basic working knowledge of botany has added a nice dimension to our travels and field trips through the years.

For some unknown reason, the mites, which had decimated our bees in recent years, did not reappear this spring. We ended up with four reasonably strong colonies, and a honey crop of 425 lbs. But two of those hives died suddenly and inexplicably at the end of the season, so what next year holds remains to be seen.

FRANK & ERNEST © by **Bob Thaves**



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My mother, Hannah - of German extraction - turned 90 in January, so family and friends had a surprise party for her at Metzger's German restaurant in Ann Arbor. We brought in a lederhosen-clad accordion player, and mother got up and danced a jig or two to his music. It was a memorable occasion.

Our younger daughter Jane still lives in Ann Arbor, and is now at work on her Master's degree in public health, while still working haltime as an operating room nurse at University Hospital. She's fully deployed, to say the least.

We continue to enjoy our books and discussion groups. One of these meets the second Saturday morning of the month, and covers just about anything and everything: God, Man, and Nature in the Past, Present and Future! We also have breakfast groups that meet at 7:00 a.m. one day a week and have gone on for twenty-five years or so. Through the U.S. foundation that we run, we have been able to help bring the Junior Great Books Program to our local public school system; several weeks ago I attended the training session for the parent volunteers who will help run this program. This has gone on for five years now, and has been quite gratifying. Our Adult Great Books group is still up and running after better than 15 years - a very worthwhile and stimulating effort.

Our recommendation this year for an excellent book to read is Will and Ariel Durant's *The Lessons of History*. In less than a 100 pages, the Durants summarize what they think they learned from writing a whole shelf full of history books. We've now read it several times, and each time get something new out of it ... one sign of a Great Book.

During the year, we were fortunate to renew our acquaintance with Pat and Adolph Schmidt. Adolph was once Ambassador to Canada, and taught me a lot of history when we served together on the board of The Environmental Fund. We also ran into Dr. Russell Woodburne, one of my favorite professors in medical school

(he taught human anatomy), is still bright and sharp in his 90s. In addition, I chanced to meet up with Art Underwood, my freshman roommate at Michigan State. I remember our first meeting very well: Art was four years older, had served in Korea, had a mustache, and was obviously a man of the world. My mother almost gathered up her firstborn to take him back to the farm, rather than leaving me in such dangerous surroundings!

A highlight for Mary Lou was co-hosting nine Kappa Alpha Theta classmates for three glorious summer days in August. They teamed recollections and reminiscences with retained youth and vigor to create even more fond memories. They keep in touch

As to technology, I've long tried to follow Alexander Pope's advice:

Be not the first by whom the new is tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old
aside.

- An Essay on *Criticism* [1711]

I have gradually gotten sucked into the computer world, and I must say that e-mail in particular is quite spectacular. I have also picked up something called a Palm Pilot, which is an excellent way for us list makers to organize ourselves electronically. Of course, we've had our share of electrical problems, computer crashes and other conundrums, but I think this gadgetry is here to stay.

People continue to ask me to consider running in the year 2000 for Michigan's U.S. Senate seat, now amply occupied by Senator Spencer Abraham, who has been our nemesis and one of the main opponents to immigration reform. I've been thinking about this, and the thinking has led me to the conclusion that if it were to come to pass, it would be best to run as a third party candidate. Mary Lou and I have struck up a relationship with the Michigan Reform Party, which, as you can see from the enclosed clipping, even asked me to run as their write-in candidate for governor! What will come of all this remains to be seen. Running a multi-million dollar political campaign does not sound like a retiring way to retire!

At the peak of the fall color season, Mary Lou and I again spent a full 24-hour solar cycle at our wood lot, with all outside influences and contacts turned off. We trimmed dead limbs on the red pines, and watched clouds roll by, and mused as the heavenly bodies wheeled overhead at night. It helps to restore one's perspective.

We hope you also have had a challenging and enjoyable year, and that the coming one will offer a full complement of joys and satisfaction.

John and Mary Lou