

2001 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

Happy Holidays

AT THE WINTER SOLSTICE – DECEMBER 21, 2001

Hurray! The days are getting longer!

We were privileged to do some traveling this past year, and thought you might be interested in these jaunts.

In early April, we returned for about the fifth time to one of our favorite haunts: the Chiricahua Mountains and Wilderness Area in southeastern Arizona. The American Museum of Natural History has a field station there, where one can find quite inexpensive room and board. The mountains go up to nearly 10,000 feet, and as a result, develop a good snow pack in the winter. In early April, the streams are still active and running well. The mountains are laced with wonderful trails, many of which form loops, taking one back to the point of origin. This is one of the richest places in the United States for bird life, for many species come up from Mexico into only this area, including about ten kinds of hummingbirds. There are many hummingbird feeders in the spring breeding season. Anyone can stay at the biological station; it is a great outdoor get-away spot. We will probably return in the spring of 2003. Nine friends joined us this year. If you would like to come along on the next trip, or would like more information on the biological station and its environs, just let us know.

The second outing was a “male” thing – the 30th anniversary trip in June of our local canoeing group, which has paddled in Canada every year since the early 1970s. We are going a little soft though: only about half the group paddled in this year. Others went in by floatplanes or motorboat. We had the use of a remote cabin on one of those huge Canadian lakes – it had only one other cabin on it. Quite a treat – and a retreat!

Our third tour gave us pause, since it meant being out of Petoskey for the first two weeks of July, when this area is at its best. But we signed on for a trip with the Population Institute to Eastern Europe, where we had never before visited. Our group of about 20 was led by the Population Institute staff. We visited Warsaw, Krakow, Prague, Dresden, and Berlin. Most amazing was the restoration of these areas to the prewar condition after the devastation of World War II. Old plans and photographs were dug out and the buildings were reconstructed to their former ornate splendor. It certainly would have been much easier to put up modern buildings. We take this as testimony to the natives' sense of history.

At Karkow, we walked the banks of the Vistula River, which gave us a clear mental image we were able to recall when we learned of its flooding later this summer. We also visited the famous Krakow salt mines - a place where my father occasionally threatened to send me when I got out of hand as a youth!

In Prague we had three days of meetings with representatives of about a dozen Eastern European countries: the Baltic and Balkan States, Hungary, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Uzbekistan, and so on. It was worth the price of the trip to learn first-hand of the staggering problems many of these areas face, and the courageous efforts of these folks to address them. In line with the Kipling quote above, seeing other countries gives one a better appreciation for one's own.

Our fourth trip was a swing in August through Michigan's Upper Peninsula with our daughter Laura, her husband John, and our then 11-month old granddaughter Olivia. We drove to Munising and the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore on the Lake Superior shore. We then worked our way east, hiking, picnicking, kayaking on the Two Hearted River about which Hemingway wrote, and having a generally good sightseeing time. The Upper Peninsula is still relatively pristine.

Olivia is a big new event in our lives. She arrived on August 30, 2000. It has been fascinating to watch her grow and develop. Her father was a competitive swimmer in high school and college, and Olivia has taken readily to the water. It is great fun to take her into a pool - she will be dog paddling before long.

Getting a chance to see her again in October involved another type of trip: from a meeting in Washington, I took Amtrak to Miami, where she lives. It was a 23-hour ride, and provided a fine chance to see the country next to the tracks. It ranges from prosperous at either end to fairly depressed through South Carolina and Georgia.

The most telling event of the year for us was my mother's death in early February at age 93. She was the last of Mary Lou's and my parents to go. With her passing, for our family at least, the pioneer era ended. Mother had watched her grandparents, who had taken our family farm in the Thumb of Michigan up from the government in the late 1800s, pass on when she was a child. She was raised in the pioneer farm home. I spoke at her funeral, and likened life to a baseball game. When we are born, we're protected in the dugout, our parents are on deck in the batter's circle, and our grandparents are in the batter's box. When our grandparents' turn at bat is over, whether by strikeout or homerun, we all move up one place. The Umpire has just called "batter up!" We are now in the batter's box to do the best we can.

Discussion groups continue to be big things in our lives. There is the weekly 7:00 a.m. men's and women's breakfast groups we attend, and bi-weekly noontime Great Books sessions that have introduced us to many works and ideas that we never would have encountered otherwise. Then there's a "salon" that meets the second Saturday of each month at 9:30 a.m. We discuss topics ranging from Islam to poetry, from genetic engineering to energy. These help keep us "on our toes." Use it or lose it!

A collection of natural history concerns help keep us occupied. We still have a (too) big garden, and were again troubled by several new insect pests that have

plagued us the past several years. One wonders what this portends. We still keep bees (for 40-plus years now). They provide the raw material for our annual Honey Swingout over the Labor Day weekend. This gives us an occasion for a big in-gathering of family and friends to help extract the honey - and to sample the product! Daughter Jane and husband Hugh joined us. She's still a nurse in the OR at the University of Michigan Hospital; engineer Hugh was transferred by GM to Toronto for several months. Laura, John, and Olivia were there, too.

This past fall was very wet, and as a result, excellent for mushrooms, which are mostly water. We took a mushroom identification course from a friend who has her Ph.D. in mycology. This gave us a reason to visit several of the preserves of the Little Traverse Conservancy (LTC), which I helped form some twenty-five years ago, and which has become a major player in trying to preserve the character of our area. The LTC has thus far protected 14,000-plus acres of land and fifty miles of shoreline!

As I write, it is 40 degrees outside with no snow in sight. This is a nervous time for many folks in this winter resort area. Is the climate changing, or is this just normal short-term weather variation? We've tried to follow this question with the help of the University of Michigan Biological Station 20 miles north of here. It hosts one of the main climate-change study programs in the United States - indeed, in the world. We often attend lectures there. I hope to take an algae course there next summer.

Mary Lou continues her work in opposition to billboards through Scenic Michigan, which she helped found half a dozen years ago. She also spends a lot of time on questions of aesthetic designs for signs and outdoor lighting to help keep the nighttime sky dark, and eliminate glare problems that can plague us aging drivers! She helped found the Outdoor Lighting Forum, composed of citizens and planners from Emmet and Charlevoix Counties. She was honored for her community work this year by a local group.

I continue to work on immigration questions. In that connection, I cannot avoid mentioning September 11, which radically changed the complexion of our work. Before that date, we faced a massive amnesty of perhaps 9-million illegal aliens, plus in due course, their many family members. Now, in pursuit of national security, nearly everyone talks of the need to better patrol our borders, and to improve scrutiny of those coming to the United States. Since we began this work in 1979, this is our best chance for some real progress. Too bad it takes such tragedy to focus public and political attention, but that is human nature. In the wake of the attack, a visit by Mary Lou's high school pen pal from England - who has been blind from her youth - was cancelled because planes were not flying. We did proceed after some hesitation with what we call our Writers' Workshop, an annual in-gathering of people from around the country and the world who work on various aspects of immigration policy. This was our twenty-fifth meeting. Over 100 people attended.

My other big public interest concern is bilingualism: do we want to maintain a common language for the United States? We work on this via the organization ProEnglish. One legal case we contributed to came out of Alabama, where the state

lost a suit requiring it to provide drivers' license examinations in languages other than English. Alabama appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court; we attended the arguments in that body's august chambers. The court decided five-four for our side, holding the state was not bound to provide examinations in other than English. Next target: bilingual education.

One big question physicians face upon retirement is whether to keep their medical licenses current. In Michigan this requires 50 hours of continuing medical education (CME) per year. I decided to maintain my license - it is hard to let go! This provides an excuse for a walk to the hospital from my downtown office for noontime CME meetings, a nice thirty-minute roundtrip hike. I get to see old friends and stop by the hospital library to read the weekly issues of *Science* magazine. I'm trying to learn more about infectious diseases, now so much in the news. Again, use it or lose it!

The most important book I read this year: *GeoDesitnies* by Walter Youngquist, a petroleum geologist. It is five-hundred pages on energy sources, both conventional and "renewable," and on mineral resources as well. Anyone wishing to understand the resource challenges we face would do well to spend a few evenings with this book. It is available from the bookstore at <www.thesocialcontract.com>. I also read Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence*, a five-hundred page tome on Western Civilization. It was tough going, but a worthwhile course all by itself in the last 500 years of Western history.

In the end, however, life came down to poking the fire. We replaced the stove in our basement with a new, more efficient one with a glass front. Keeping it stoked gets me going upon arising in the morning and closes out my day at night. We also have a stove in our Douglas Lake cottage, where we spent a good many happy hours this year, including one whole week. It is a half-hour trip by kayak to the aforementioned University of Michigan Biological Station, so we can paddle over for dinner, an evening lecture, and return by moonlight. The cottage has electric heat (it was built in 1973), but also has a stove and fireplace, which we use instead. So there is a second stove in my life that also requires stoking and poking on cool northern Michigan evenings.

We hope this finds you and yours fully engaged as the calendar is poised to roll over to a new year. Here's to more peaceful resolutions of mankind's disputes in 2002!

John and Mary Lou