

2004 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

At Year's End 2004

With apologies to Garrison Keillor and his "Prairie Home Companion":
"It's been a quiet year here in Petoskey, our hometown!"

By quiet, we mean no hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, wildfires, tsunamis, etc. – for which we give thanks. On the other hand, there has been a lot going on, much of it not so dramatic as the above, but perhaps more significant:

IMMIGRATION: John gave his first talk on immigration in 1970 – 34 years ago. The organization formed to deal with this issue – the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) – came into being on January 2, 1979 – 25 years ago. At the annual in-gathering of the immigration reform movement held in Washington, D.C. this past October our fellow reformers presented us with some mementos of our role in the movement. These were much appreciated and reinvigorating, as has been the work of literally hundreds of others who have contributed to the effort.

The immigration issue itself seems finally to be coming into its own. As you doubtless have noticed, the first intelligence reform bill had significant immigration control measures in it, only some of which made it into the final bill. However, the issue is on the front burner for the new Congress; now we'll see if we can deliver the goods of significant reform. Incidentally, journalist Lou Dobbs has an immigration item almost every night on his CNN news program at 6:00 p.m. (EST), and repeated several hours later. Perhaps you'd like to tune in. If you'd like information on any aspect of the immigration conundrum our country (and many others) faces, we'd be glad to hear from you, or you could visit the Websites for FAIR and NumbersUSA at <www.fairus.org> and <www.NumbersUSA.com>.

OFFICIAL ENGLISH: Another related concern on which we have worked for 20-plus years (starting with California's Senator Hayakawa in 1981) is the question of the number of languages in which our government should operate.

Our vehicle for this work is the organization ProEnglish, which works mainly through the courts. The most exciting development in 2004: we have learned how to work with several public interest law firms to handle our court challenges. These firms provide the legal talent; we need only pick up the out-of-pocket expenses, which is much the smaller of the two parts. If you'd like to explore the issue further, there is more information at <www.ProEnglish.org>.

BILLBOARDS and OUTDOOR LIGHTING AND SIGNS: These have been Mary Lou's areas of concentration for many years. Scenic Michigan is the vehicle for the billboard work, which involves many trips to Lansing for meetings with legislators on possible remedies. The work with Emmet County Signs and Lighting Committee and the Outdoor Lighting Forum has come along nicely in recent years as local contractors, elected officials, school administrators, business owners, and other interested individuals have been educated on how to light the grounds surrounding their projects and facilities, rather than the night sky. Result: we can see the stars!

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES: Along with many of our local fellow citizens, we have tried to avert the onslaught of big-box retail store development, which has come anyway, though perhaps under some better conditions than would otherwise be the case. We note two more ominous vacant storefronts in downtown Petoskey. Just a half mile from our home, there was a proposal for 131 home sites on 60 acres, currently stalled. All this takes us back to the population concerns that have motivated us for so many years. More people = more development. The Census Bureau's projection is for adding 130 million people to our numbers by 2050 ... where will it all end?

OIL: All of which is not unrelated to our petroleum/natural gas/energy situation. We have spent a good deal of time trying to sort out fact from fiction, and have come away convinced that we are on the cusp of switching to a seller's rather than the buyer's market we have enjoyed for the last 50 years. That promises substantial changes in the price and how we do business and live. We'll all be hearing more on this topic.

BOOKS and IDEAS: In view of all the public interest work with which we've been involved through the years, John's nomination for the "best read" of the year is *The Great Campaigns: Reform and War in America 1900-1928*. It was published in 1971, and is by our good friend and colleague, historian Otis L. Graham, Jr. He tells the story of the progressive era and what its proponents hoped to accomplish. The book finishes with sobering after-the-fact thoughts by many of these same "reformers" on how their analyses were off the mark or where they went wrong. An example: their work was "too logical and not sufficiently psychological" "Just the facts" was not enough ... emotions had to be dealt with too. This book helped to provide a sobering reassessment of what we've been working on and are trying to accomplish. Copies are available at Internet used bookstore sites, such as <www.abebooks.com> or <www.alibris.com>.

Mary Lou's nomination for the "best read" of the year is *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear* edited by Paul Rogat Loeb. It's an inspiring compilation of essays and stories by political leaders and heroic activists. It spans nations, eras, and political movements, and reveals what keeps us going when times get tough.

We also belong to several book/discussion groups that force us to read many items that we would never get to otherwise. We sometimes are able to get the authors of these books on speaker phone, and thereby enrich our discussions. A number of these groups have gone on for 25 years or so. One meets at 7:00 a.m. The same folks keep coming back, so they (like us) must get something in return for the effort! Islam has become a favorite topic of study for all of these groups. If you are also thinking about this, you might like to look into Samuel Huntington's book, *The Clash of Civilizations*.

John also took a course in macro-economics at the local community college, and found it quite stimulating. The tuition is free for a senior citizen. At the office, we completed Volume XIV of our quarterly journal, *The Social Contract* <www.TheSocialContract.com>. It deals primarily with population, immigration, conservation, and language issues.

FIELD STUDIES: As we try to do each year, we both took a five-day mini-course at the University of Michigan Biological Station, 25 miles north of here. Mary Lou's was in digital photography; John's in the aquatic plants. We also joined the Michigan Botanical Club's Upper Peninsula foray to see some of the plants and butterflies the U.P. has to offer.

PETOSKEY: The big thing in our small town with a population of 6,000 souls, was the opening of our brand new library, with beautiful new terrazzo floors, handsome wooden bookshelves, and carpeted reading areas. It replaces our 1908 Carnegie Library, built for \$25,000. It was a joy to see the youngsters from the local grade schools, walking two-by-two, hand-in-hand to an introduction to the library. Yes, our town is small enough that one can still get around by walking! We continue to benefit from a very active local theatre group, several choirs, and a string orchestra. It's really quite amazing for a town this small.

Also on the local scene: we are now up to about 40 years of beekeeping. Despite several diseases and pests to which the bees are subject, we had a good year with over 600 pounds of honey from three hives. The garden continues to get us down on our knees (with knee pads!); a good position to be in some of the time. The peach tree yielded another fantastic crop, and we had some fine strawberries as well.

The Little Traverse Conservancy (LTC) made a video this past summer of some of us who founded it 25-plus years ago. That gave us a chance to philosophize on what we thought we were trying to do. LTC has now protected about 20,000 acres of land and 50 miles of waterfront by either donation, purchase, or easements. This certainly has been a concrete and satisfying effort with which to be associated. We are fortunate to have much public land in these parts, reverted to the state during the Depression years for failure to pay the real estate taxes. This provides much scope for recreation and helps preserve the rural characteristics of our area.

In a related and less happy note, the Asiatic pest known as the Emerald Ash Borer, which has been devastating trees in southeastern Michigan, took a leap to our area this past summer. All of the white ash trees within a half mile of the infestation are being cut, in an attempt to contain it. Ash is one of our favorite trees, with its wonderful interlacing bark and its fine straight-grained wood. Losing it from our forests would be a major blow. The beech trees are also under siege and dying from a bark fungus – but enough of that gloomy business in what should be an upbeat year-end letter.

FAMILY: We're fortunate to see our two girls, their husbands, and our grandchildren fairly frequently. Daughter Jane is a nurse at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor; her husband Hugh is an engineer with GM. Daughter Laura presented us with our second grandchild (yet another John) in March. Her husband John developed viral meningitis during the family's visit to Petoskey this past summer. He ended up in the hospital, but fortunately came out of it unscathed. We get to see them at their Coconut Grove home near Miami several times a year.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN: John got back on downhill skis at Aspen this past February with a group of friends, and decided that it would perhaps be a good idea to get back off them while he was still intact. Cross country skiing and snowshoeing make more sense at this stage.

A ProEnglish Board Meeting took us to Arizona in June, so we extended the trip to once again visit the south rim of the Grand Canyon. It was fun watching the Cinemax movie of a present-day raft trip down the Colorado River, similar to one we took back in 1969. We walked part way down the Bright Angel Trail – and made it back up again!

At the close of the summer, we took in the Hillsdale County Fair in southern Michigan. It's the last fair of the year in the state, and is presided over by Mary Lou's brother Keith. We also have brand new fairgrounds here in Petoskey, keeping alive an attachment to former and simpler times.

So there! We got all the way through this report without once mentioning the presidential campaigns! We'll close by again plagiarizing Garrison Keillor, this time from his daily radio show "The Writer's Almanac":

"Be well, do good work, and keep in touch!"