

2005 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

At Year's End 2005

We opened last year's missive by giving thanks that during 2004, we were not in the path of any hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, wildfires, tsunamis, etc. We reaffirm our thanks for 2005, and extend our condolences to those who were not so fortunate, of which there were a great many around the world this year.

Gathering wool: That is a nice old-time phrase for just sitting and thinking about things. My favorite place this time of year for this increasingly common inactivity is in front of our woodstove. It has a nice glass front so one can watch the ever-changing flames. My justification: I am helping to save a little bit of fossil fuel by burning some wood! It also goes along with my resolve to read less and think more about what I'm trying to do. As an 88 year-old physician colleague says, "One of the benefits of a weakening recent memory is that you do not need to read so much, since you can't remember what you read anyway!" Here are a few of the things we have been thinking about and working on over the last twelve months.

Energy: I surmise that we have all heard about the energy challenges facing us. It is sometimes hard to know what to believe. One of the best sources I have found is the monthly newsletter of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil (ASPO). You can see a sample copy and ask to be put on the free distribution list at www.peakoil.ie/newsletters/asp059. We all have to make up our own minds and plan accordingly.

Bees, trees, and the garden: We have kept bees for 40-odd years. It is harder now with the advent of insects parasitic on the bees, bacterial diseases that need to be treated, and a back that is not quite as willing to lift

the 70-pound boxes. Nonetheless, we harvested about 120 pounds this year. Fortunately I have acquired an apprentice, who is in his mid-30s, and wants to learn about beekeeping. I am trading off instruction for some of the heavy lifting – a good trade. It is also gratifying to help bring along the next generation of beekeepers.

We spend as much time in the woods as we can. We are caretakers of a segment of the North Country Trail, which runs through our county, on its way from its origin in New York State to its terminus in North Dakota – 4,600 miles. This just involves clearing away windfalls and picking up what little trash hikers leave behind, which is very little with this group of people. We had several toboggan runs cut through the trees below our house for the grandkids, and hope they can use them this winter.

The garden is still a colorful (as to the flowers) and a tasty (as to the vegetables) diversion. We had our best-ever grape crop this year, which helped fill the winter larder with jam and juice. Two years ago, a friend gave us some ever-bearing yellow raspberry canes. They fruited right up until frost this fall, and were very tasty. Mary Lou freezes some of them individually on cookie trays to grace our winter cereal bowls.

Avocations: We pursue the same interests – immigration policy (there finally seems to be some motion on this topic), language policy (likewise in play), limiting billboards (through Scenic Michigan), and regulation of outdoor lighting, hoping to keep the night sky darker than it would otherwise be. For our daily dose of the news, we have switched to Lou Dobbs on CNN, since he so frequently covers the first two of these concerns.

Use it or lose it: We have learned that "getting back into shape" is an oxymoron. It is best to try to stay in some semblance of shape. We both use the nice new walking and exercise facility at our local community college, along with other efforts to stay flexible, stand up straight and keep moving. The college also tries to keep our minds limber with a weekly noontime lecture series and tuition-free access to courses. Last year I audited one on macroeconomics. No tests to take! The college also has a

very nice natural area that borders on the Bear River, which runs alongside the campus and through Petoskey.

Tempus fugit: Time flies! This forthcoming June will mark the 50th anniversary of my graduation from Michigan State University. Mary Lou finished in 1957. We are looking forward to a reunion. Next year will mark my 45th anniversary of graduation from medical school. I still keep my medical license current, though I will likely never use it again. Perhaps it is a matter of pride, but I should be mindful that “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before the fall.” (*Proverbs 16:18.*)

Chewing the fat: We are both fortunate to belong to several discussion groups, most of which have gone on for 30 years or more. We read and discuss books, cover current events, and whatever else catches our fancy. John's nomination for the most thought-provoking book of the year: *Collapse* by Jared Diamond. Mary Lou's candidate (in light of disturbances in France): *Camp of the Saints* by Jean Raspail. We also enjoy the local community film series, which shows non-commercial films two evenings a week in Petoskey's recently renovated Carnegie library.

Travel: Last spring, we visited for the sixth time the American Museum of Natural History's Southwestern Research Station in the Chiricahua Mountains at Portal, in southeastern Arizona. About a dozen other friends interested in natural history joined us for a week of hiking, discussing, bird watching, sitting in the sun, and taking a snooze! We plan to return in the spring of 2007. Join us – seriously! Let us know if you might be interested, and we will send you information.

From Arizona, Mary Lou and I drove via Hoover Dam and southern California's Mojave Desert to King's Canyon National Park, which we had never visited before. We arrived just as the spring runoff was at its maximum – the flooded rivers were quite a sight to see, not to mention the mountain redwoods. The adjacent Mineral King portion of the park is higher, and was still closed by snow. We then drove to Sacramento for several days of meetings on the English language question before flying

home. Earlier in the year, we visited Sun Valley with friends, but just for cross-country skiing. Our downhill skiing days belong to an earlier era.

Hurricane Wilma: Daughter Laura and her husband John, and their two children, Olivia (age 5) and John (age 1 ½), live in the Coconut Grove portion of Miami, and were caught up in Hurricane Wilma. They were quite well-prepared, but two feet of water in the house still leaves a big mess. Both cars were partially submerged in salt water, resulting in a total loss. The electricity was off for two weeks. Good thing we have learned how to control Mother Nature! Daughter Jane and her husband Hugh live high and dry in Ann Arbor, and thus escaped all of the maladies mentioned in our opening paragraph. This past summer, Jane walked sixty miles in three days to raise \$3,800 for cancer research and treatment.

Natural history interests: We are still interested in the natural world around us. About one night a week, we have a nice serenade from the local pack of coyotes. There are lots of wild turkeys, geese, and sandhill cranes in the neighborhood at various times of year. There have been several nice glacial geology field trips, with examination of the footprints left by the glaciers when they retreated from this area about 10,000 years ago (according to the geologists). Last December, Mary Lou and I donated a nearby 20-acre parcel to our local land conservancy. We had purchased it several years prior, to help assure that at least some land survives as open space and does not go into the intense development that has enveloped our area. That was satisfying.

I will mention under this heading that we had many good times at our Douglas Lake cottage this past year. It sits right next door to the University of Michigan's Biological Station's 9,000 acres of undeveloped land. Family and friends helped keep the place occupied and the trails in use during most of the summer.

Tuesdays with Morrie: That was the name of a famous book of several years ago, telling about the author's weekly visits with a terminally-ill friend. My Tuesdays are given over to trying to excavate my study and

clear up the debris of many years. Mary Lou has been doing a good job of going through her piles of paper, and urges that I do my part, too.

That is about it. We hope that during 2005, you have been able to follow your bliss, have found some time for peaceful reflection, and that you join us in looking forward to the year ahead.