

## 2006 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

### *At Year's End 2006*

Another year into the record book! We are now both beyond the Biblical three score years and ten, and feeling a bit of wear and tear, on which we will not dwell. Here are a few items that kept our pots boiling in 2006:

**Immigration:** I began working on this contentious issue in 1968, so it was with a great deal of satisfaction that we watched the Senate immigration debate on TV this past spring, even though we did not think much of the direction it was taking. With the political realignment of Congress, the debate will be even more testy come 2007. A signal event: the United States reached the 300 million population mark in about October, with immigration now the driving force for further expansion of our numbers. Do we want to go there? That is the question.

**Language:** We launched the question of declaring English the official language of government back in 1983, working with Senator Hayakawa of California. For 23 years we have been trying to get it on the national agenda. So it was again with a great deal of satisfaction that we saw the issue come up as part of the immigration debate, and actually be voted on two times. We will get there yet!

**Billboards:** On the distaff side, Mary Lou and her colleagues have been working to control billboards in Michigan for a decade now. The agency is Scenic Michigan (SM), which they formed way back in 1990, and is an affiliate of Scenic America. SM conducts workshops around the state on how to create sign and lighting ordinances.

**Dark Skies:** Mary Lou continues her efforts to keep the skies dark around Petoskey by proper shielding of night lights. The city has shielded many of its streetlights, as have many private homeowners; Harbor Springs has now

shielded or re-lamped all their city lights. This has really made quite a difference.

**Gardening:** We still enjoy getting some dirt under our fingernails. A favorite project is keeping the Amaryllis bulbs going from year to year. We enclose a picture of one of them. We had good peach and grape crops, and Mary Lou made jam. The bees continue to produce, and I have found a young chap who wants to learn about

bees, in exchange for helping out with some of the heavy lifting. It's gratifying to pass on what I've learned in 50 years as a beekeeper. A friend gave us some yellow raspberry plants several years ago, and these have proved a fine addition. They yield right up until frost.

We would be glad to send you some young plants in the spring if you would like to give them a try. We planted in an enclosure for deer the cold weather greens, kale and collards, and hope to have them throughout the winter. This past summer we again found a monarch butterfly caterpillar munching on a milkweed on our land. We put it a gallon jug, kept it well fed with milkweed leaves, and watched it form its chrysalis. Olivia then took it home to Florida, and she and her classmates watched the butterfly emerge at school after about 10 days – a truly amazing transformation.

**The Next Generation:** Daughter Laura, her husband John and children Olivia (age 6) and John Xavier (age 2) paid us a nice three-week visit during the summertime, and we had a chance to visit them in the Coconut Grove area of Miami in the winter time of the year. John X. is an extremely energetic two-year-old! We took Laura and the grandchildren to Disney World, staying in one of their wilderness cabins. It was a good time. Olivia has had two ear surgeries for a cholesteatoma and has one more to go; we hope that will take care of it. Son-in-law John is in the commercial real estate business in Lauderdale, 30 minutes north of Miami.

Daughter Jane still works in the operating suite at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. She has on two occasions gone on voluntary surgical missions to Honduras, and quite enjoyed and benefited from the experience. This past summer, she went to Spain for a month of total immersion in Spanish, which she anticipates putting to good use on future trips back to Honduras. Son-in-law Hugh works for General Motors, and rotates between their plants within several hundred miles of Ann Arbor.

**Travel:** In the spring we fulfilled a longtime wish to see the tall grass prairie. We flew to Kansas City, Kansas, and took side trips to the Harry Truman Library and a local botanical garden, both edifying. We visited the Steamboat *Arabia* Museum in Kansas City, an exhibit of a riverboat that had sunk in Missouri River in 1856. In 1988, it was found and excavated. It lay

about half a mile from the present-day river; under about 40 feet of silt – testimony to the dynamics of the oxbows on the river. Then we headed out to the prairie. This was a fine experience, though we were told that the time to see the prairie is in the fall, because the "grass is tall in the fall." The park headquarters are just north of Cottonwood Falls, Kansas, where there are some 360-degree views without a human structure in sight; offering dark skies at night, too. The trip took us up into Abilene, Kansas, Dwight Eisenhower's hometown. There is a fine presidential museum there, highlighting World War II. Mary Lou and I have visited quite a few of these presidential museums – a list of all of them is enclosed. We hope to eventually visit them all, and recommend them as a way to better understand our country and times. If you'd like a fuller report on our tall grass prairie visit, let us know, and we'll send it along. Then we moved on to Omaha, Nebraska, for ...

**Berkshire Hathaway's Annual Meeting:** We had lunch with Warren Buffett in the spring of 1982, when his stock was \$300 a share, but we were not astute enough to buy any. (It recently closed on Wall Street at \$100,000 a share!) Several years ago, however, we did buy some of his class B stock (only \$3,000 per share!), which entitles one to attend the annual corporate meeting. It is one of the extravaganzas of American capitalism. There are 400,000 stockholders worldwide, and about 22,000 attend this meeting. There are displays of products made by companies he has acquired, and a very entertaining question-and-answer session that lasts for about five hours and features Mr. Buffett and his partner, Charles Munger. The meeting is held in an old basketball arena, in order to accommodate the huge number of attendees. This was quite an experience, and well worth the trip. We shared a taxi ride with a chap who came all the way from Australia for the meeting!

**Local Bookish Activities:** Our weekly breakfast discussion meetings continue, as they have for 30 years or so. They are great fun, though we never really solve any problems! We also have a monthly meeting, dubbed the Second Saturday Salon. One of our programs this fall dealt with the Depression Era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). We visited the remains of a local CCC camp, and found it quite interesting. There is also a biweekly "Great Books" session. We read mostly the inexpensive reprints of classics in paperbacks from Dover books, and after each session, adjourn to a local Chinese restaurant for lunch.

**Rapid Development:** Our area is among the fastest-growing ones in our country, and after having lived outside the city for 40 years, the city is now expanding to engulf us. To help preserve a little countryside, we donated 20 acres of open space and wetlands to Little Traverse Conservancy, a local land conservancy, which we helped to form some 30 years ago.

**Douglas Lake Cottage:** We had a chance to spend some time in the late summer at our cottage on Douglas Lake, 35 miles from here. The University of Michigan's Biological Station is located on the lake, and we often take in some of their lectures. We enclose a photo of a particularly spectacular Douglas Lake sunset. There is especially nice hiking there, as we are located right next to the station's 9,000 acres of undeveloped property.

**TV:** We confess to watching more television than formerly. One of our favorite programs is the British Prime Minister's questions session, where he has to appear in parliament each week and answer questions from his fellow parliamentarians. These are very lively, and are carried on C-SPAN. We also like to watch the C-SPAN 2's *Booknotes*, and *Lou Dobbs Tonight* on CNN, for his reporting on immigration matters. We enjoy *The Red Green Show*, a slapstick comedy from Canada, and even confess to watching some of *The Lawrence Welk Show* reruns.

**Ornithology:** Mary Lou has taken quite an interest in birds, their songs in particular. Many good recordings are available these days, and following this hobby helps keep us in touch with the natural world.

**Pretty Lakes Camp:** This is a youth camp south of Kalamazoo. Two years ago, my sister and I hosted a family gathering there over the Thanksgiving weekend. It went so well that we gathered again this year, with 26 people in attendance, including four generations. The main purpose is to give the nieces and nephews a chance to get to know each other, as their homes are fairly widely scattered. We have too much to eat; work 1000-piece jigsaw puzzles; play backgammon and various card games; and go hiking. Good fun! We hope to do this again in two years.

*Duma*: This is the movie version of the book, *How it Was With Dooms*. This fine book is the story told by our friends David and Carol Hopcraft of the pet cheetah their son Xan had on their ranch in Kenya. The movie does not follow the book too closely, but it still is very much worth seeing. We recommend it. It is available on DVD.

That about wraps it up for 2006. We hope you have had an engaging year, and look forward to receiving your news. On to 2007!

*John and MaryLou*