

## 2007 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

### As 2007 draws to a close ...

**Winter.** I am working on this letter as the first really heavy lake-effect snow descends upon us. Nice! This brought out a squadron of snow-plowing pick-up trucks – they fared poorly last winter with minimal snow.

This is a favorite time of year, for we can again stoke up the woodstove in the basement. It provides a good deal of our home heat. A pleasant pastime is watching the flames through the glass front of the stove. We also fire up the sauna on occasion and alternate heating up with making angels in the snow to cool off. Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are right out the back door, on the many trails in this region. We also visit our Douglas Lake cottage to see what it looks like in its winter mode. We ignite the woodstove, melt some snow, and make a pot of tea ... winter is a welcome slow-paced season!

**Natural History.** The natural world still claims a lot of our attention. This fall brought a big die-off of water fowl in this area, presumably due to botulism. We grieve, in particular, to see the loons lose out, with their haunting calls. Coyotes are becoming much more common. We often hear them yapping at night. The spring peepers are a delight, and thankfully still with us, since the bypass proposed for Petoskey some years ago was defeated. It would have run right through their swampy homeland.

The Little Traverse Conservancy, which we helped start some 35 years ago, is still high on our list of charitable interests. The Conservancy has now preserved about 38,000 acres, and about 90 miles of waterfront. Quite a record! I am privileged to serve on the land acquisition committee. This year, Mary Lou and I were pleased to help secure property for relocation of a portion of the North Country Trail, which runs right through our county. This is a 4,600-mile long footpath from New York State to North Dakota. (We sent along a brochure on it last year.)

We are now working on what we have tentatively dubbed the "Isaiah project" to preserve some wild lands southeast of Petoskey. The name comes from the Biblical book of Isaiah, Chapter 5:8:

*Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay  
field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed  
alone in the midst of the earth!*

The local Audubon Chapter is very active, combining many hikes with an active monthly evening program on many interesting and informative topics. Our birdfeeders provide their usual delights, with a flock of red-breasted nut hatches resident this year. We see and hear the occasional pileated woodpecker at the cottage, and hear the hooting of the great horned owls at night from our house; soon they will be breeding. We capped all this off with some CDs that combine the sounds of nature: running

water, the winds souging through the pines, and the calls of birds and beasts. The best sets in our judgment are Dan Gibson's "Solitudes," available on the Web at amazon.com.

**Yard and Garden.** We're still keeping bees, having been at it for 50 years or more. There are many new or recurrent problems. The parasitic mites arrived a decade or so ago, and can weaken a hive to the point of killing it. We've probably all heard about colony collapse disorder (CCD), widespread across the United States, and with no definite cause yet discovered. There is also an old bacteria disease called foul brood, for which we actually feed the bees the antibiotic tetracycline! But we persist, and enjoy supplying honey to folks and exchanging it for maple syrup with Mary Lou's nephew, Dwight Brown, whose sugar bush is in New York State.

When we first settled here on 40 acres on the outskirts of Petoskey, we unwisely planted something called crown vetch as a ground cover (on the recommendation of Michigan State University!). This proved to be a very invasive weed, and the curse of Mary Lou's flower beds. It finally took over and killed our rhubarb. There appears no way to get rid of it short of herbicides, which we are not anxious to use, especially in the garden where we are producing food. Frequent hoeing and digging are the remedies.

Overall the garden is still quite productive. We built a 20'x20', 8-foot high fence to exclude deer from a portion of it, where we grow our winter greens: kale and collards. Late summer plantings of spinach and a winter hardy lettuce (in the family for more than 100 years) also winter over in the enclosure, providing early greens in the spring. The little ten-foot square greenhouse in which we start many of our plants in the springtime provides us with an instant Florida vacation the end of February and early March. When the sun comes out, it warms up to 75 degrees in no time, and is a splendid place to have lunch – or take a nap – or both. We were fortunate this year to have had enough rainfall to keep the garden well watered.

The north-facing hillside north of our house, which had been kept in grass by grazing cattle until we bought the property in 1965, has now grown up with many trees, some of which we planted. Some are getting so big they are now obscuring the view! We are removing some of the non-native species, Douglas fir and Scotch pine in particular, so we can see Little Traverse Bay again.

Last year, the original 39 year-old cedar-shakes roof on our house finally gave out. We replaced it with a standing-seam steel roof, which will long outlast us. We quite like both its function and its appearance.

**U.S., Inc.** U.S. is the name of a small 501(c) (3) tax deductible foundation that we established about 35 years ago. We use it to house the several projects that hold our interest. Most prominent amongst these is the immigration question that we so often see and hear of these days. We actually started working on this conundrum in 1968 – 39 years ago! There is a certain satisfaction of seeing it finally come up for public discussion. The

successful opposition to the disastrous amnesty bill that Senator Kennedy brought forward in the Senate earlier this year was largely organized through groups we had helped establish.

The official English question is another one that occupies much of our time. One of the lead organizations in this effort is ProEnglish, which is actually a project of U.S. The immigration policy failure has led us to the language policy question: Do we want to be a bilingual and bicultural nation? We achieved two favorable votes on English in the United States Senate this year, after 20-plus years working on that issue. Lots more to do!

Mary Lou continues to be heavily involved in the Scenic Michigan organization (chiefly opposed to billboards) and serves at the county level on the local sign and lighting committee keeping both lighting levels and energy consumption directed downward, and preserving the dark night skies.

**Use It or Lose It.** Many of our community's discussion groups have gone on for 30-plus years now. The women's breakfast group meets on Wednesdays at 7 a.m.; the men's group at 7 a.m. on Thursdays. Another group called the Second Saturday Salon meets on the second Saturday each month from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. We have vigorous discussions of some article or book that has been circulated and read by the group ahead of time. A Great Books group meets at noon the second and fourth Mondays of each month to discuss a work that we have all read beforehand. Our local community college has a lecture series that brings in outstanding luncheon speakers nearly every week. A local film theatre shows 'avant-garde' foreign films twice a week, and two choral groups and a chamber orchestra perform throughout the year. The Little Traverse Civic Theater group that has been around for about 50 years completes the circle. There is no shortage of things to do in this small town.

**Television and Radio.** Our favorites: *C-Span 1*, where we try not to miss the British Prime Minister's weekly questioning by the House of Commons – a rollicking good time! *C-Span 2* provides good book reviews and interviews, and covers floor action (or inaction) in the U.S. House and Senate. On NPR, the programs *Alternative Radio* and *New Dimensions*, often present very interesting and challenging ideas. We have also found the presidential candidate debates informative and even entertaining.

**Travel.** We see less travel in our future. It is going to be much more expensive, and certainly more vexatious. But we still made it to Coconut Grove to see daughter, Laurie, and her husband, John de Olazarra, and our two grandchildren, Olivia, age seven, and, John, age three. In November, a jet boat trip to Key West (140 miles at 27 knots per hour) afforded the chance to see Harry Truman's alternative "White House." This was fascinating, especially since Truman is one of our favorite presidents.

Daughter, Jane, and husband, Hugh Thomson, live in Ann Arbor. Hugh is an engineer at GM, and Jane is a nurse at the University of Michigan

Hospital. She has been organizing yearly mission medical trips to Honduras and finds the effort and experience worthwhile.

We also have an interest in the lighthouses of the Great Lakes, and last summer took a boat trip up the Saint Marys River from the northern reaches of Lakes Michigan and Huron through the locks at Sault Ste. Marie. This took us past the Detour lighthouse, one of the prominent ones that has been restored. One can rent it for a weekend or a week. The water is down considerably, thus also the tonnage that ships can carry.

**Forty-nine Years and Still Counting!** Mary Lou and I are coming up on the fiftieth anniversary of our marriage in 1958. Next summer also marks the centennial of the University of Michigan Biological Station at Douglas Lake, where our cottage is located, and where we have taken a number of courses since we moved to this area in 1964. We anticipate many pleasant moments and reminiscences at these festivities.

My Sebewaing High School class had its 55<sup>th</sup> reunion this summer, and it proved to be good fun. Showing how astute we are, we decided to meet again in two years rather than five, recognizing the reality of the situation. We will also meet at noon rather than in the evening, so that we can see better for the drive home!

That about wraps it up. We hope you will stop by if you're in our area.

P.S. As part of an oral history project, a DVD has been made of John's involvement in the immigration and language issues. We'd be glad to send you a copy if you'd like to watch it. Just let us know.