

John and Mary Lou Tanton year-end letter - December, 2009

Call 911!!

Mary Lou and I are still in the beekeeping business, though now on a much reduced scale. I started back in high school, some 60 years ago. You have doubtless read about the troubles with bees and the resultant decrease in pollination and the impact of this on our food supply. Additional pests that infest the bees continue to arrive from overseas, and the ones that have been here for a while are becoming resistant to treatment. Nonetheless, it is a great diversion, and the honey is a welcome by-product, along with wax for candles.

To help the bees survive the snow and cold of our northern clime, we put a tarpaper skirt around each hive, nailing it to the bottom. Then we fill the intervening space between the walls of the hive and the tarpaper with wood shavings. This makes excellent insulation. When spring arrives, we open the tarpaper covering at the top to inspect the bees.

I was doing this last spring, and had my smoker lit. I set it down to get some bee tools from the nearby garage. As I came back, I saw that the entire hive was on fire! Of course, the petroleum impregnated tarpaper burns very well indeed. There was a brisk wind coming from the west. I hollered out to Mary Lou, "Bring some water." She responded, "Call 911." We went back and forth several times, but finally she called 911. The operator wanted to know if there were any buildings or propane tanks nearby- positive on both counts! But by this time, the wind had blown the fire towards the adjacent woods, which were just on the verge of catching fire. Fortunately I was able to contain it.

In the meantime Mary Lou had also called the fire department, 2 miles away. She caught the fire chief just as he was walking out at the end of the day. He arrived in a few minutes with a couple of his firemen, and we got the whole thing well doused with water. I noticed one of the firemen was fiddling with a pad of paper. I suspected I was about to get a citation for lighting a fire when I wasn't supposed to, due to dry conditions. I passed bottles of honey all around in thanks for the firemen's help, and that seemed to take care of the situation! The bees died, I'm sorry to report.

I had a small fire in a bee yard once before, but put it out by myself. With all of the highly combustible beeswax around, you can imagine the potential for a real bonfire.

As my very German maternal grandmother was wont to observe,
"We get too soon oldt, and too late schmardt."

We still enjoy the pursuits we picked up as farm kids, to these many years ago. Mary Lou concentrates on the flowers, and I on the veggies. But the garden is far too large, and has been so for several years. We have not yet succeeded in cutting it down. Fortunately, a vigorous young man from the neighborhood who likes to garden appeared on the scene. He provided us with a great deal of the help we needed to stay on top of things.

Soon after acquiring our tract of land some 45 years ago, we discovered a huge "pudding" stone in the field below the house. The stone was now hidden by pine trees and covered with moss. It looks like a pudding, hence the name. This is a conglomerate stone made up of many different kinds of rock, including red jasper, which is the characteristic component. This one is huge, about 6 feet long and 2 Y to 3 feet in diameter. It is the very handsome handiwork of a glacier, which quarried it from bedrock on the north shore of Lake Huron and transported it all the way to our property. The mother lode is supposedly located at Bruce Mines, Ontario, Canada.

Mary Lou had long wanted to have it by our house, so we finally bit the bullet and hired a local excavating company to relocate it. The equipment operator said he thought it weighed four and a half tons! So Mary Lou now has her "pet rock" by the garden and greenhouse, as the photo shows.

Mary Lou has developed an increasing interest in birds, and our feeders are visited regularly. As I write this, a flock of 13 wild turkeys are in the driveway, looking for something to eat. This past summer, two hen turkeys with 16 chicks picked raspberries in the garden! These birds are much more wary and stronger than the ones we used to raise back on the farm. Generally, animals in domestication tend to decline in vigor-you and I included! A soft life softens us up.

Mary Lou continues to labor away on her Scenic Michigan project, trying to control billboards and preserve the night sky. Do visit the website <www.scenicmichigan.org>.

We keep talking about the need to start moving papers and books out of our house, where we have lived for forty years now. Mary Lou is doing a better job of it than I am. I seem to lack the energy to attack the task when I get home from the office. The "office" is that of U.S., Inc., a small foundation that I started back in the early 80s. It provides the vehicle for much of the work that Mary Lou and I do on a variety of conservation, population, and immigration topics. If you'd like to know more, visit our website <www.thesocialcontract.com>.

Worldwide, the immigration topic in particular is coming to the fore, as there is a tremendous number of people on the move all around the world. With 75 million people (net) being added to the world population each year, the pressure to relocate can only grow.

Mary Lou's brother, Keith, passed on April 1, after a short illness. He was three years her senior, and still very much involved in the community, as was the whole family. For a number of years, he ran the main district office for his U.S. congressman. He was president of the county fair board, etc., etc. Such people are not easy to replace. The guard is changing!

We got to Washington three times this year. On one of these trips in June, Mary Lou was on a PBS television program dealing with our topics, population in particular. We are starting to record programs for Community Access TV (CATV) -that will be shown nationwide, we hope.

We have been following as a related concern the rise of Islam in the U.S. Is there more trouble in the offing? Christianity and Islam have been adversaries nigh onto 1400 years, and it seems unlikely that competition for land and members will stop anytime soon.

In the spring, we dug nice carrots that had been left in the ground over winter and well covered with mulch. The ground didn't freeze, and the carrots were in excellent shape. This year we are doing the same with beets and potatoes.

Soon we'll visit Miami to see our grandchildren, and their parents for Christmas. Olivia, age 9, has taken to sailing at a local club. Their Optimus boats are ten feet long and Just right for the youngsters. If the craft capsizes, she is able to right it and keep on going. We all had nice times together at our Douglas Lake cottage this summer.

We again hosted the summer board meeting of ProEnglish, our organization working for the designation of English as the official language of government in the United States. We have been able to move the topic thanks to the legislation on health care. We're trying to append the language asking that medical records be kept in English, not dozens of other languages.

Thanksgiving week, we visited Ypsilanti's Automotive Heritage Museum & Miller Motors Hudson. Mary Lou's father owned 39 Hudsons-trading one in every year in his position as a district manager for State Farm Insurance. The museum also had Tucker, Kaiser, and Frazer autos. It is well worth a visit. They have a website <www.ypsiautoheritage.org>.

Your correspondent turned 75 this past year, and I'm noticing it. I have a form of Parkinson's disease, the type that makes you slow, stiff and weak, not the shaking type. The treatment part is quite good, yet very expensive. Nothing new there!

We wish you well and hope you're still plugging away, and that our country's economic ills have not been too unkind. Now off to sit in the sunny greenhouse for lunch!