



## Tall Tales, Provocative Parables, Luminous Clarity and Evocative Truths: A Modern Log from the Sea of Cortez

An Earth Manifesto story by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
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This is a tall tale, I assure you. Seven great gal friends and I arranged a weeklong "bareboat" charter of a 42-foot catamaran sailboat on the Sea of Cortez in March 2008. We sailed north from the city of La Paz along the rugged coast of Baja, Mexico. The Sea of Cortez has marvelously clear water and is dotted with dozens of hauntingly beautiful arid islands. Known to some as 'Mexico's Galapagos', the area has an exceptional amount of biological diversity. The most fascinating life forms we saw were tall sentinel-like saguaro cacti, numerous diving pelicans, soaring frigate birds and impressive marine animals like whales, porpoises and sea lions, and giant squid and huge sleek manta rays.

We gals were figuratively following in the footsteps of marine biologist and philosopher "Doc" Ed Ricketts and author John Steinbeck, who were accompanied by five others on a six-week-long biological expedition afloat on the Sea of Cortez in 1940. Steinbeck's thought-provoking book about the voyage, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, is a literary gem that contains rare intelligence, wit and some fascinating observations, and it presents valuable ideas in a well-organized manner. John Steinbeck explains that the perspectives in his *Log* were stimulated by an engaging philosophic open-mindedness among good friends during their voyage in this remote aquatic wilderness.

My purpose in this narrative is to relate the story of the adventure we gals experienced, and at the same time to provide a *Modern Log* that will serve as an insightful navigation guide to the salient ideas and perspectives of John Steinbeck, 'Doc' Ricketts and a number of other great writers and thinkers. This tale includes entertaining aspects of our own experiences, along with big picture perspectives on topics such as the cosmology of the Universe and the physical processes involved in Earth's ecosystems, and some with compelling insights into our *Ancestor's Tales*. Reflections on deep aspects of our human consciousness are also explored as they relate to ecology, human nature, religion, spirituality, politics, literature, waterboarding and the interconnectedness of it all.

The primary organizers of our excursion were Samantha and Natalie, who both have extensive boating experience. Their sailing expertise allowed us to bareboat rather than being required to hire a captain and a crew, so we had an enjoyable exclusiveness and privacy on our voyage. In addition, crew members Gabriela and Ashley also have had a fair amount of nautical experience, so they helped pilot the boat and set the sails and make sure the boat was anchored securely each night, and both of them are amateur naturalists who contributed greatly to our depth of awareness. Four other gals enthusiastically shared the adventure, preparing meals and recording the proceedings: there was me, there was Carrie, there was Mary, and there was Grace. We all enjoyed a wonderful camaraderie during our eight days and seven nights aboard the catamaran afloat on the Sea of Cortez. Here's the story.

### Day One

Strong north winds prevailed during our first several days on the gulf. Whitecaps whipped off the tops of swells on the first leg up along lovely Isla Espiritu Santo (Holy Spirit Island!). Waves became increasingly organized as we sailed predominantly upwind. Our sailing speed peaked at almost 9 knots, which is slightly faster than the maximum speed the engines of the catamaran could propel the boat. The relatively rough weather saved us from the more ambitious plans of Captain Natalie, who wanted to pursue a course that would have involved longer days of sailing or motoring to destinations further up the Baja coast. Due to the strong winds and sizeable swells, we were able to

enjoy more leisurely days, and to burn less gasoline to boot. We had all anticipated an adventure that would be very memorable if not personally epic in proportion, and it had begun.

In his *Log*, Steinbeck noted, "We were curious. Our curiosity was not limited, but was as wide and horizontal as that of Darwin or Agassiz or Linnaeus or Pliny. We wanted to see everything our eyes could accommodate, to think what we could, and out of our seeing and thinking, to build some kind of structure in modeled imitation of the observed reality. We knew that what we would see and record and construct would be warped, first, by the collective pressure and stream of our time and race, and second by the thrust of our individual personalities. But knowing this, we might not fall into too many holes; we might maintain some balance between our warp and the separate things, the external reality."

As we gals set off on our exploration, full of our own curiosity and good cheer, we were well aware that there is indeed a distinct subjectivity to all perceptions. We took the time to ceremonially acknowledge our appreciation for our main organizer, Captain Natalie, who had handled all the arrangements for the charter of the boat so that none of the rest of us had been required to deal with the signing of necessary legal documents. These were filled with daunting elaborations of frightening possibilities aboard the boat, along with associated penalties, as well as a variety of potential portentous acts of God. In his *Log*, John Steinbeck described the solemn feeling that had come over his crew upon reading the intimidating terms of their charter. He remarked that at least one of their group had even "contemplated for one holy, horrified moment a vow of chastity." Ha!

We were spared such concerns, and indeed the need to make any vows at all, so we were able to freely, confidently and happily enjoy our excursion. We spent the first night securely anchored in Ensenada Grande in the lee of a ridge on the west side of Isla Partida. This lovely "Big Cove" has a beach that had been named one of the most beautiful in the world by a British travel magazine. Most of us gals had brought cameras along on our adventure, and the photos we took are evocative reminders of the natural beauty we found in the Gulf. Some of us look great in skimpy clothing, bikinis, and tight wet suit jackets, and even occasionally bare-breasted on warm days -- but that is a different story. Good Grace!

*"A healthy and wholesome cheerfulness is not necessarily impossible to any occupation."*

--- Mark Twain

Our catamaran was appropriately named the *Gato de Cortez* -- the Cat of Cortez. From the boat we observed the visual beauty surrounding us. Like curious felines, we uninhibitedly explored the sea and the uninhabited islands and even the shore of the Baja mainland to the west. It occurred to us that the existence of thriving habitats, undisturbed by humankind, is a marvelous remnant of an ancient world that existed in a much more wild and harmonious ecological balance. Seeing this, and being appropriately intrigued by it, we were deeply affected. We loved both the memorable images and rich experiences, and we appreciated the wildlife and awe-inspiring awareness of the natural processes that surrounded us. Our journey was like an unfolding revelation that gave us enlightened perspective, and it provided satisfaction and solace to our souls. We felt as though the svelte and agile Magnificent Frigatebirds, hovering high on the wind with their long, narrow wings and forked tails, had soared into our minds and transmitted a clarity and nobility of self and purpose to us all. This energizing and liberating feeling was a wonderfully welcome contrast to our more mundane lives back home.

The mysterious manta rays and playful porpoises in particular seemed almost like allegorical animals in their wild state of abundant exuberance. Their prolific existence in this aquatic wilderness could be seen as representing a kind of inspirational hope for ecological salvation in the world. None of us gals believed in literal Biblical sin or religious salvation, or Hell or Purgatory or Heaven, but it does seem clear that everyone struts and frets their hour upon the stage, and we do so in a state that one might imagine being similar to Dante's Limbo, the coolly provocative imaginary afterlife place. "Pagans" are welcome in Limbo, so Socrates and Plato and Aristotle might be seen philosophizing there in an olive grove, and more modern luminaries like Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein would probably be busy on the lecture circuit and social circles, where thousands of brilliant and idiosyncratic characters share the realm.

*"Go to heaven for the climate and hell for the company."*

--- Mark Twain

Back to the boat. After a delicious dinner on the first evening that featured a hearty *sopa de tortilla* topped with fresh avocado, grated white cheddar cheese, crisp fried tortilla strips, chopped cilantro and a squeeze of fresh lime juice, Grace told us about her studies of psychology and Carl Jung's concept of archetypes, and about insights found in Joseph's Campbell's *The Power of Myth*. She also related fascinating perspectives she had gleaned from Jean Shinoda Bolen's *Goddesses in Everywoman*. Grace indicated that a good way to get from darkness to light, from illusion to reality, and even from incomprehension to insight and liberation, is through introspection and empathetic understanding, and through both abstract thinking and delving into heart-aware ruminations. In vivid contrast, many people emulate the men in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, who seem to prefer illusions to reality and comforting beliefs to acuity of awareness, even though they may be transparently imaginary. Do most people really NOT want to know deeper truths?

Each of us regarded ourselves as being open-minded. At times we were girls just wanting to have fun, but at other moments we sought more enlightened understandings. John Steinbeck had noted in his *Log*: "We knew that what seemed to us true could be only relatively true anyway. There is no other kind of observation." It turns out that narrowly focused observation can be similar to overly wrought conviction: it can be fraught with the risk of being rudely inaccurate, and it generally involves the sacrifice of truths about reality and the objects of our observations -- and about our true inner selves, as well.

Mary urged us to consider the Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant. Buddha supposedly told this story that made it clear how subjective the nature of perception can be. A group of blind men were asked about the nature of an elephant. Each blind man touched a different part of the elephant, so each described what he felt in completely different terms, even though they were all trying to describe the same animal. They purportedly quarreled over their adamant convictions, clinging to narrow interpretations of their experiences and failing to account for larger truths. Good God!

Every person similarly formulates his or her own concepts and worldviews, and a wide range of cultural and religious influences affect the way we interpret these individual perceptions. No matter what we think, there is no single conception or ideology or dogma that is the only true actual right one. Atheists, agnostics and scientists all describe the same universal reality and animating force that is perceived by fundamentalist religious folks -- they just all do so from their own particular subjective points of view and beliefs, as filtered through their own individual biases. More than a dozen years after our voyage, sadly, manipulative demagogues are pushing devious narratives and coldly calculated self-serving agendas, trying to fool folks about the "truth".

There can only be one true activating force in the Universe, infinite and mysterious in its aspects. Ultimately, we are all like blind people attempting to set forth our conceptions of what the nature of the Universe is, or why it exists, or how it may have come to be. I suppose that some people like to buy convenient and simplistic packages, complete with self-proclaimed good guides, while others prefer to wing it and bareboat! *Ooh la la!*

The way each of us sees the world is not exactly how it actually is. Words, ideas and thoughts are all constructs in our minds. They are associated with things in the real world, because they are correlated representations of them, but they are not the real objects. Our personal observations are influenced not only by the way we interpret our sense perceptions, but also by how we integrate them into these thought-constructs and worldviews that emerge as kinds of conscious projections upon reality. This largely determines the way we think things actually are, and thus our beliefs subtly but powerfully affect the way we live in the world. A wise understanding counsels us that we should not always BELIEVE everything we THINK!

"In these matters the only certainty is that nothing is certain."

--- Pliny the Elder (23CE - 79CE)

Our brains see reality and make sense out of it, even if the sense is an illusion. One way we do this is through the use of metaphors, which are "a relation of known things to the novel and the nearly unthinkable." Metaphors allow us to comprehend things more easily by using simple concepts as a substitute for more complex and abstruse understandings. Neuroscientists today are finding out surprising facts about how the associative complex of our brains uses electrochemical impulses in creating thoughts in our subconscious minds. As John Steinbeck observed,

"The harvest of symbols in our minds seems to have been planted in the soft rich soil of our pre-humanity." The limbic system's amygdala curiously plays a determinative role.

Grace told us about a book she was reading by neuroscientist Robert Burton, titled *On Being Certain: Believing You Are Right Even When You're Not*. I just can't wait to read it! I want to know all about brain phenomena like 'delusional misidentification syndrome' and the biochemical "reward centers" that make us feel good about "knowing". Maybe this will shed some light on the evangelical, social, geopolitical and fiscal fiasco of the George W. Bush years! Ha!

Certainty is impossible to achieve. But much can be learned by paying close attention. That is why biologists and naturalists study and record the appearance and behaviors of various forms of life in the niches where they live. In his *Log*, Steinbeck writes about our modern propensities of looking quickly at a whole field and then diving down to a particular. He contrasts this to great thinkers of the past like Charles Darwin, who followed a contrasting process in which, "Out of long consideration of the parts, he emerged with a sense of the whole."

We gals ruminated over this process of synthesis and integration, and it was as if the exceptional clarity of the deep waters in the Sea of Cortez helped us achieve clearer ideas in our philosophical discussions during the course of our trip. Seeing things in their broadest possible context, Grace speculated, is a good prerequisite for gaining the best understandings, and thus for us all collectively to make better decisions about smarter courses of action that should be taken in our societies. We gals even glimpsed the truths in the deepest thinking of John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts, who debated about the state of "understanding-acceptance", and about holistic worldviews that can lead to breaking through to useful and purposeful social action.

John Steinbeck had written great literature during the Depression of the 1930s, including his early compelling novel, *To a God Unknown*. In this book, he expressed his belief that the god we seek is actually not manifest in the exterior world, but resides within our own minds. He had noted in his *Log*: "It is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious ... is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable."

Storytelling has been a venerable tradition throughout human prehistory and recorded history. Long before the written word, tribal elders passed along wisdom and knowledge and legend through words, images and sounds. Ancestors in every human culture have been telling stories from time immemorial. They have been doing this to make sense of the world, to relate history, to teach morals, to entertain, to inspire, to express appreciation and thanksgiving, and to honor the mysterious. The written word, and more recently radio and television and film and the Internet, have all taken storytelling to entirely new dimensions.

A good story unfolds palpably and has evocative imagery that bonds the storyteller and the audience, creating a sense of identity, community and enveloping interest. Documentary films seem to be developing to be among the most valuable and educational of mediums ever devised. The moving-image nature of film and the unfolding of a good story make this medium one that touches us in powerful ways, sometimes more deeply than written words.

Picture this: There is a story in Chapter 11 of John Steinbeck's *Log* about a poor Indian boy in the Baja town of La Paz who found a large and nearly perfect pearl. This story becomes a great parable about greed and materialism, false salvation and evil -- AND about the woes that are attendant upon these things. In 1945, Steinbeck amplified this Mexican legend into a more complex short story in a novella titled *The Pearl*, and it was made into a provocative film, *La Perla*, in 1947.

In this story, John Steinbeck uses the literary device of an evocative song heard in the minds of Kino, a Mexican Indian pearl diver, and his wife Juana. Kino and his family are so poor that they live on the outskirts of La Paz in a small house made of brush. Kino's people, long ago, "had been great makers of songs so that everything they saw or thought or did or heard became a song." Kino had a personal song, one of warmth, security, well-being and hope. Had Kino been "able to speak of it, he would have called it the Song of the Family." Not long after finding 'the greatest pearl in the world', Kino and his good wife began to hear a Song of the Enemy, a song that became amplified as the sad story unfolds into a story of materialism and cheating, disillusionment, racism, and fateful pursuit.

Pearls are produced by bivalve mollusks that manage to isolate irritants in their soft tissues by a process of secreting numerous layers of translucent nacre to seal off the offending irritant. This nacre is known as 'mother-of-pearl'. It occurred to us gals that the isolation of irritants within such lowly and slippery creatures as oysters should imply that we supposedly superior big-brained humans should be able to be more effective in protecting ourselves against irritants that affect us -- ones like political corruption, megalomaniacal rulers, anti-egalitarian injustices, economic exploitation and ecological degradation. Why not? I drifted off into my dreams that first night, awash in the sounds and feelings of the soothingly rhythmic ripples of the sea.

### Day Two

Early in the morning, Mary summonsed us together on the prow of the catamaran for a ceremonial proclamation of words of wisdom. She quoted one of my favorite stanzas from the American poet Walt Whitman, evocative in its lyric import:

"Sail forth --- Steer for the deep water only,  
Reckless O Soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,  
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,  
And we will risk the ship, ourselves, and all."

We greeted this reading with silent and alert perplexity, and decided to head for the solace and safety of a shore excursion on nearby Isla San Jose. There we saw several deceased giant squid washed up on the rocky shore. These creatures were reddish, and about four feet long. Their appearance, with tentacles and bulging eyes, startled us. It made us feel as though we had slipped back into biblical times when there were supposedly monsters on the planet and in the seas. Seagulls pecked away audaciously, though not exactly hungrily, at the squid carcasses. From just above the high tide line, the shore areas and dry floodplains of the island were dotted with striking stands of towering saguaro cactuses, with eloquent arms, which grew in rugged arroyos and broad alluvial fans washing down from imperceptibly eroding mountain ridges.

I took a photo of an impressive two-foot-long puffer fish skeleton that was lying nearly intact but stiffly dried out on the shell-strewn beach. Elemental scenes of abundant life and death surrounded us, along with stark evidence of the pervasive struggle to survive. Perhaps this contributed to the introspective discussions we shared during our voyage. As John Steinbeck says about life in the Sea of Cortez in his *Log*, "Everything ate everything else with a furious exuberance."

Early that afternoon Gabriela wore a tight bright blue T-shirt emblazoned with the lovely image of a fox and the words <Seeking Enlightenment>. She and I were making a chunky, deliciously spicy guacamole to be served with lunch, when we heard a cry, "Porpoises!" We leapt to the deck, and saw a pod of porpoises heading in our direction. They came directly to our moving craft and then swam playfully in front of the twin prows for fifteen minutes before becoming bored with us and seeking something more interesting to do.

Such sights were so inspiring to us that Ashley found serendipity in the occasion and expressed the opinion that the human race must show greater consideration for other forms of life on Earth. We humans live at the top of an inadequately understood food chain in an unquestionably interconnected and interdependent world, so it is imperative for us to develop a greater degree of consideration for other species. A wholesome quality of life and indeed the very survival of our kind depend on our adaptive intelligence and ability to change our attitudes and habits. Such a propitious metamorphosis is needed to help preserve the healthy diversity of life on Earth.

Maintaining a salubrious balance in the natural world should be one of the goals to which our species is most dedicated over the long-term. Otherwise, by damaging the web of life, we are committing a type of slow and suicidal self-harm. The obvious conclusion of this train of thought is that humanity has an urgent need to find more effective ways to reduce our be-fruitful-and-multiply population growth, and that we must simultaneously embrace ideas and understandings that allow us to choose to live in ways that are sustainable in the long run.

We ate heartily on the boat that night, as we did throughout the trip. Fresh air and exercise always seem to stimulate the appetite. We appreciatively enjoyed sautéed shrimp served in a Posolé sauce, as if we were a coterie of ravenous princesses. Later I took a blanket and pillow out to lie on one of the two taut mesh nets that stretch

between the front ends of the catamaran's twin hulls. It was as if I was alone in the world under the brilliantly starry sky. Visible just above the horizon in the west was the Big Dipper. It seemed to linger as the bright constellation Cassiopeia rose in the east. In Greek mythology, Cassiopeia was a boastful and vain queen who had the admirable virtue of being caring and helpful to the poor. Both of these constellations can be used reliably to locate the North Star, to those who know how to appropriately triangulate across the sky. This knowledge was once important and even crucial to navigating sailors, just as it can be to backpackers and travelers in modern times. Most people today have lost the awareness of this elementary cosmic fact.

It must have come to pass that I had fallen asleep, for suddenly I awoke with a start. I had been enveloped in an intense dream. Thunder and lightning and loud trumpeting and an oddly stentorian matriarchal voice echoed through the interstices of my brain. I was trembling a bit, and seemed to recall a peal of boisterous laughter reverberating from the vaulting mountain summits to the west. Smoke rose from the remains of a tall tree on the nearby shore, and next to the smoldering ashes of the tree was one of those signs seen in botanical gardens that identify a specimen's species. It read, <Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil>. The distinct odor of burning ignorance filled the dream air. Another nearby tree was sprouting from soil that appeared inhospitable and in need of fertilization with the enrichment of some kind of rich manure. Again an incongruous sign at its base identified it: <Tree of the Awareness of Foresight and Responsibility>.

While I was puzzling out the meaning of this dream, an overwhelming inspiration made me leap lyrically to the bow of the boat in the middle of the night and fling my arms skyward like Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet in the film *Titanic*. I intoned the following words, which came to me like a force of nature:

"Hope is a wonderful thing. The world is a beautiful place. I prognosticate that we as a species will never become extinct."

No echo of my words came back to me; they were whisked away and swallowed by the gentle breeze. But the words continued to reverberate in my mind for the remainder of the night as the waves lapped regularly against the hulls of the cat. The odds, of course, weigh essentially as certain as our own individual deaths against the likelihood that our species will never become extinct.

The fossil record indicates that the average species has existed for about 5 million years before becoming extinct. In the long course of geological time, more than 99% of all species ever alive have gone extinct. How, I wonder, will we humans last 5 million years? How will we even last another 1,000 years in light of our proliferating nuclear weapons and our hyper-competition for resources and our suicidal propensities toward immoderately ruthless exploitation and violent wars? How will we be able to transcend the greed and megalomania of our leaders and privileged people? How will we survive the dangerous desperation of the poor? How will we be able to survive if we incessantly waste resources and inadvertently alter the oceans and the gaseous composition of the atmosphere, and insensitively damage Earth's ecosystems and biotic realms?

In any case, it appears almost certain that the human race will drive a significant portion of all other species of life to extinction in the foolishness of our needy and greedy zeal and in the desperate fury of our fight for money, property, status, prosperity and survival. Scientists estimate that something like 50% of all the millions of species of life on Earth could be driven to extinction in the next 100 years alone.

Richard Leakey, one of the world's foremost paleoanthropologists, said in a speech in February 2006: "There is an inevitability to extinction, but there is no inevitability to the cause of extinction being our own stupidity and failure to act."

A Zen master reserves judgment. "Is that so?" such a spiritual master would say. "We'll see." I myself, being a strong advocate of sensible precautionary principles, am ready to decide!

John Steinbeck and 'Doc' Ricketts had found that a leisurely state of mind was conducive to expansive thoughts on their expedition on the Sea of Cortez. They had realized that it was valuable to be disconnected from the frenetic 'real world' and its many obsessively compulsive concerns. We gals discovered our own sense of the validity of this observation.

Neurobiologist William Calvin wrote a good book, *The River That Flows Uphill: A Journey from the Big Bang to the Big Brain*, in which he relates stories from a two-week-long rafting trip he had made down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. He remarked that it was a perfect setting to explore important subjects with fellow scientists as they descended down through the layers of ancient rock exposed by the erosive power of the Colorado. Engaged with the natural world and "inundated by the evolutionary stories told by the Grand Canyon itself", Calvin found that an open mind and serendipitous insights into life's big questions are facilitated by conversations with others during a wilderness adventure. The rest of these *Tall Tales* provides for some eye-opening, perhaps even startling perspectives that occurred to us gals during the course of our journey.

### Day Three

Pelicans, ancient wise, hung out on dense stands of mangroves in island inlets, and on sandy spits and rocky prominences near the water. When one pelican would discover a school of fish, a gathering of the big birds would suddenly come together and wheel around in the air with abandon, circling and then plunging determinedly by the dozen into the water in their ancient ritual of feeding and survival.

When pelicans fly over at close range, their anomalous large heads, elongated bills, massive throat pouches and long wings are impressive, and the white-striped parts of their underwings are beautiful. They look for all the world like veritable relics of their 65-million-year old dinosaur ancestors. All species of birds alive today are the only surviving descendants of extinct dinosaurs, and pelicans look the most like what you might imagine to have evolved from ancestors such as Pterodactyl, whose existence long ago is revealed in fossilized remains.

Ponder this for a moment. All animals come from parents, who came from previous generations, who came from predecessors in an uninterrupted line of descent that can be traced far back along the tree of life into the murky recesses of evolutionary history. It is intriguing to realize that not only did each of us have great grandparents, but parents before them, and before them, and before them, and so on, back to a moment not some mere thousands of years ago when God PRESTO! created us all in "His" own image, but back to ancestors millions of years ago, long before our species became genetically separate from others whose descendants are still alive today.

Our most recent *Homo sapiens* ancestor, stretching back along the long limbs of the tree of life, was *Homo neanderthalensis* --- or was it *Homo erectus*? Sometimes it's hard to know! This curious line of thinking allows us to recognize that *Homo sapiens* are NOT the pinnacles of creation, despite the vanity and conceit that leads us to suppose this is true.

Evolution has reached many millions of 'interim ends' in the form of all currently surviving species of life at this point in time. Our human brains and self-reflective capacities make us unique, but so are other creatures like octopi that express a dazzling light show of colors which shimmer across their bodies, or bats that can easily fly in the dark using echolocation, or caterpillars that miraculously metamorphose into butterflies, or plants that produce 'food' from minerals and water and sunshine by using the all but miraculous process we call photosynthesis, or whales that sing elaborate 'songs', or birds and other animals that can unerringly migrate thousands of miles without getting lost. Our eyesight is poor compared to raptors; our hearing and sense of smell are not nearly as good as that of most dogs; we are not as nimbly alert as a lizard or a hummingbird; we cannot regenerate a lost appendage; and if we were to be crammed through a sieve it would be quite terminal, whereas some varieties of living sponges are able to simply *reassemble*. Albert Einstein, enlightened by extensive evidence, once sagely observed that either everything is a miracle, or nothing is a miracle!

Molecular biologists and geneticists are able to analyze the DNA of every animal alive today, and to then correlate DNA in degrees of similarity. This allows scientists to determine approximately how long ago the predecessors of a given species diverged on the tree of life from any other species. This understanding reveals that at some point far enough back in time, the human race has common ancestors with any other animal. Our ancient ancestors some 300,000 generations ago were the same mammals that were leading to both chimpanzees and gorillas. Our ancestors 1.5 million generations ago (about 25 million years) were not only our ancestors and those of chimps and gorillas but also of all 100 extant species of Old World monkeys. Our ancestors about seven million generations ago, at the time of the Cretaceous Extinction, were small prosimian primates that were something like today's lemurs, shrews and bushbabies, believe it or not!

This realization is profoundly thought-provoking. It is the premise upon which Richard Dawkins based his insight-inspiring book *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution*. Dawkins cleverly uses one of the most famous books in English literature for the inspiration for his ancestor's tales: Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Those *Tales* are culturally interesting, moralistic and satiric stories that involve pilgrims on a journey from a London tavern to the town of Canterbury. Dawkins has borrowed the rough structure of these narratives, and then creatively expanded on the idea to include a wide variety of scientific information about the genealogies of our predecessors and those of other forms of life. He has immeasurably improved on the archaic "there were giants in the earth in those days" fables of the Bible. Dawkins' approach traces our ancestors back to the beginning of time, long, long, long before the mythic Adam and Eve, using modern evidence provided by fossils and DNA as they are interpreted through the science of genetics and molecular biology.

"*The Ancestor's Tale* is a pilgrimage back through time; a journey on which we meet up with fellow pilgrims along the route as we and they converge on our common ancestors. Chimpanzees join us at about 6 million years in the past, gorillas at 7 million years, orangutans at 14 million years, as we stride on together, a growing band. The journey provides the setting for a collection of some 40 tales. Each explores an aspect of evolutionary biology through the stories of characters met along the way or glimpsed from afar -- the Elephant Bird's Tale, the Marsupial Mole's Tale, the Coelacanth's Tale. Together they give people a deep understanding of the processes that have shaped life on Earth: convergent evolution, the isolation of populations, continental drift, the great extinctions. The tales are interspersed with prologues detailing the journey, route maps showing joining lineages, and life-like reconstructions of our common ancestors. *The Ancestor's Tale* represents a pilgrimage on an unimaginable scale: our goal is 4 billion years away, and the number of pilgrims joining us grows vast -- ultimately encompassing all living creatures."

Dawkins' *Bonobo's Tale*, as an instance, is about the bonobo, one of two living species of chimpanzees. This is an endangered species that lives in forests of the Congo in western central Africa. These animals are classified as the species *Pan paniscus*. Together with chimpanzees, which are classified as the species *Pan troglodytes*, they have DNA that is more than 98% the same as *Homo sapiens sapiens*. They are thus our closest living relatives. We have a common ancestor with these two species about 6 million years back along the tree of life -- an ancestry that we share with them more recently than with any other living species.

The Bonobo is famous for having a matriarchal culture, and for the prominent roles of sexual activity in conflict resolution. Can't we all just get along?!

Civilization has taken us far away from the elementary experiences of our hunting and gathering ancestors, and it leaves us out of touch with the roots that secured us long before we developed agriculture. Evolution shaped us from pre-humans to humans over the last 200,000 generations, during which time our ancestors hunted animals and gathered plants and herbs, and their brains grew relatively rapidly, tripling in size. There must have been a salubrious evolutionary advantage for big brains ... maybe they allowed us to better see true causes and assess impacts and plan ahead more fortuitously!

Today it is becoming increasingly obvious that we urgently need to begin using our big brains for far-sighted, synthetic thinking and intelligent courses of action, rather than to fall prey like hapless victims to big-brained leaders who are outwitting us by continuously manipulating us into consuming things, incurring enormous amounts of debt, obeying authority even when it is misguided, believing in suspect ideologies, voting for rashly corrupt representatives, giving our support for wars, rapidly using up natural resources, and degrading the environment.

The legacy of our long human pre-history of hunting and gathering is found in a variety of cooperative endeavors. There are also contrasting instinctive human propensities toward being ruthless in competition, and in anger and violence. Fortunately, there are also somewhat more feminine values and attitudes that are oriented to creating win/win situations and serving to mitigate conflicts, and these attributes help us work together to create better prospects for flourishing and surviving.

Humanity began adopting a settled existence within the last 500 generations or so. Our ancestors built growing civilizations by utilizing surpluses generated through the cultivation of crops and the domestication of animals. Together with advances in medicine and public sanitation, such undertakings have helped reduce rates of human



mortality previously caused by childhood afflictions and starvation and disease. These civilizing changes have been greatly beneficial for our kind, and thus have made big contributions to skyrocketing increases in the number of human beings alive on Earth. Human numbers have increased from 1 billion in the year 1800 to almost 8 billion today.

The modern Industrial Revolution has been taking place only since the middle of the eighteenth century, but it has revolutionarily altered our living patterns, and allowed us to adapt to lifestyles oriented around more urban and consumer impulses. Our genetic makeup has not changed much in this period of time because the process of evolutionary adaptation by means of natural selection and genetic mutation involves many generations -- and much longer periods of time.

Our deep human roots are connected back in time to primitive tribes; and though we sometimes seem to be extraordinarily flexible and adaptable, our civilized ways are merely a cultural overlay on more ancient behavior patterns. When we get away to wilderness areas or open spaces, we can make more intimate contact with the positive aspects of these roots, and nurture them, and vastly improve our connection to the overlying high culture, and prevent dislocations, and develop healthier perspectives.

All life today can trace its ancestry back, in large evolutionary terms, through an eons-long series of 'close-call' closing doors of species extinctions. All members of every species alive today have a connection that has never been interrupted connection back through time to ancestors that survived the Cretaceous Extinction 65 million years ago when most dinosaurs and a large proportion of all other species of life died out, apparently due to the global effects of a devastating meteor impact. The ancestors of all species alive today also had to have made it through other nasty times like the Permian Extinction 250 million years ago, the most lethal mass extinction event ever.

Think about this: Studies of DNA reveal that hippopotamuses are the closest living relatives of whales. Really! It turns out that all marine mammals, including whales and porpoises, are descended from land-living mammals that evolved from the ancestors of modern hippos. Marine mammals have colonized ocean habitats, but unlike fish that breathe through gills, they still need to surface to breathe through lungs, just like their ancestors did on land long before. They have adapted well to life underwater, and it is sad that we humans are slaughtering them in modern times and polluting their habitats or bursting their eardrums with our underwater military sonar. Ancient hippo/whales began their divergence outward along the growing branches of the tree of life around 54 million years ago. We humans must go back 85 million years to get to the point at which our common ancestors diverged from those of the whale/hippos.

As I remember gazing down into the wine dark sea, I think of a question that should have arisen at the time on the boat. We are relatively recent relatives of hippo/whales, compared to how long ago we share common ancestry with cold-blooded fish, some of which we happened to be having for dinner that night. Natalie had procured a number of fairly big fish fresh from a fisherman in a small village on the Baja mainland near Punta San Evaristo. We filleted the fish and sautéed them perfectly, subtly spiced, and served them with a variety of tasty fresh vegetables.

The question is: How long ago was it that mammals diverged from fish, far back along the evolutionary branches of the tree of life? Yes, back before mammals, and earlier than reptiles, and even before those glistening amphibians. Back to ancestral species of fish! To find the answer, I consulted Wikipedia. That site has an outstandingly informative entry for Richard Dawkins' *Ancestor's Tales*. After a Synopsis and an entry about the Phylogenetic Trees of Life, Wikipedia summarizes Dawkins' narrative journey that takes us back in time to various "rendezvous points" with our common ancestors. There I sought and found my answer: we have common ancestry with fish about 440 million years ago.

Wow! That is only about 100 million years after the Cambrian explosion, a point at which multi-celled organisms first evolved. Before that, for a period of something like three billion years, all life on Earth consisted of single-celled organisms. And, before that? Our home planet no doubt had an awesome period of stupendously conglobulating matter during its formation, as one can imagine by looking at the entire surface of the moon, which

is still pockmarked with impact craters that do not erode due to geologic and atmospheric conditions pertaining on the moon that are quite different from those on Earth.

Evidence indicates that some 500 million years or so passed after Earth formed and the waters of the oceans accumulated before the first cellular forms of life were sparked into existence in Earth's seas. Creationists may scoff cynically at these ideas, because they cling to dogmas that deny such broad scientific understandings. An odd failure to accurately comprehend has allowed people opposed to this grand unified theory of biology to miss the crux of the facts. Humans are NOT descended from apes. No! The fact of the matter is that both we and apes are descended from common ancestor species, back along the extensively branched tree of life.

"The more you explain it, the more I don't understand it."

--- Mark Twain

The subject of family genealogies is full of curious irony. For instance, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormon Church) is well known for its huge collection of genealogy records. Since many faithful folks traditionally had a dozen kids or more, and since polygamy is still practiced among some Mormon fundamentalists, it is no doubt especially interesting for them to trace their genealogies. The irony comes from the fact that the stories in the Book of Mormon trace back into history to connect with 'lost tribes of Israel' and earlier genealogies in the Bible, yet the certainty with which the faithful cling to these tales often denies modern discoveries about the actual eons-long genealogy of our species far back in our true evolutionary roots.

Most Creationists have probably not read John McPhee's *Basin and Range*, a book that provides a big picture story of the unfolding of geological understandings. McPhee tells of James Hutton, "the father of geology", who discovered a formation known as an angular unconformity on the east coast of Scotland in 1795. An angular unconformity is an anomalous juxtaposition of sedimentary rock layers that have been formed at widely differing times in geologic history. These layers are not parallel, as they were when they formed in accordance with the laws of physics and sedimentary rock formation, so the layers necessarily formed in different geologic eras. The angular unconformity that James Hutton found led him to elaborate theories of rock formation and the eventual categorization of the Eras of geologic history according to various layers of rock and signature fossils found within them. Geologists identified a Pre-Cambrian Era before about 540 million years ago, a Paleozoic Era ('old life'), and a Mesozoic Era ('middle life'), and the Cenozoic Era ("recent life"). The Mesozoic is known as the "Age of Reptiles", while the Cenozoic is known as the "Age of Mammals".

These Eras were later broken down into geologic time spans denoted as Geologic Periods. For instance, the Mesozoic Era was classified into three Periods: the 50 million-year-long Triassic, the 55 million-year long Jurassic, and the 80 million-year-long Cretaceous. These Eras in the history of Earth are demarcated by mass extinction events during which the door closed forever on many species. The Permian extinction marked the end of the Paleozoic, at which time more than 90% of all species went extinct. The Cretaceous Extinction marked the end of the Mesozoic, at which time more than half of all species went extinct, including all dinosaurs except those whose descendants are represented by the many species of birds alive today. Such extensive extinction calamities later led to the next flowering of biological variety that emanated from the surviving species, which proliferated into newly available habitats and ecological niches.

One means by which scientists have correlated geologic dates is by using fossils found in various rock layers as "index species". In the Grand Canyon, the traces of nearly two billion years of geological periods are recorded in colorfully contrasting layers of sedimentary rock. It is as if Nature were shouting at us, saying "LOOK HERE! Here is the bright and incontrovertible evidence of the Earth's essentially almost eternal age. HERE is the record of time unfathomable."

Fossils occur in an ordered sequence from the oldest life forms in the lowest layers to more recent ones higher up. These ancient relics give us extraordinarily cogent clues of long eons in evolutionary history. Fossilized remains form a distinct record, unlike the engravings that Mormons believe were made by the Angel Moroni on golden plates that have unaccountably or phonily disappeared. The fossil record is a true physical record that can be studied today, so in this regard, fossils are dramatically different from the supposed proclamations by God that Moses claimed were inscribed on stone tablets on Mount Sinai. Sorry for the ridicule, but *really!* The denial of evolution

by religious zealots is strongly correlated with retrogressive attitudes that have had serious adverse consequences for people in the course of many centuries, and are still pathetically virulent today.

An even more certain confirmation of the processes of evolution is found within each and every living thing -- in the genetic DNA of every form of life. DNA provides "an almost unbelievably rich gift to the historian. What historian could have dared hope for a world in which every single individual of every species carries, within its body, a long and detailed text handed down through time?" DNA in each species of organism recapitulates the entire evolutionary genetic code involved throughout its long transformative survival.

The mists of my imagination diffused as our third day on the Sea of Cortez came to an end. As I was falling asleep, an old saying came to me: "The mind is like a parachute: it works best when it is open."

#### Day Four

We saw three 40-foot-long whales swimming along on our starboard side on a calm morning as we motored up toward Isla Santa Cruz. This was the furthest north we ventured in the Gulf. Gabriela, slender and spiritual-minded, called out to the gentle whales with a message of consolation and apology to these awe-inspiring marine mammals for all the tragic slaughtering of their ancestors and relatives that our species has done over recent centuries. Sultry Samantha noted that the songs of gray whales sometimes change, and that such shifts spread to other whales around the world's oceans within a matter of weeks. The hearing of whales is so sensitive that they can communicate such changes in their songs at large distances underwater. From this standpoint, it is thoughtless and cruel to deploy eardrum-piercing sonar in whale and dolphin habitats, as our American military seems so mercilessly motivated to do.

We members of the human race are good at messing things up with little glimmer of recognition that our activities cause terrible harms to other animals. Nor do we generally seem concerned that our activities are having devastating impacts on the environment that supports us and all life forms. We are often severely out-of-tune with the grand natural designs around us, but when we get away from the 'civilized world' into areas of wilderness, it does feel as though the rich experiences we have can renew us and help reveal such truths, and maybe spark greater commitments to precautionary protections of species and healthy habitats.

We would be wise to heed the urgings of such ecologists as Wallace Stegner, whose *Wilderness Letter* was instrumental in paving the way for passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964. This Act wisely preserved wilderness areas for all people in present and future generations. The *Wilderness Letter* concluded that wilderness "can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope." I like that concept: a geography of hope! Let's go there!

We women tried to consider all points of view aboard our chartered catamaran. We recognized the value in the discussions that John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts called 'speculative metaphysics', as is mentioned in the preface to *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. Since everything is ultimately relative, the use of a variety of approaches and a synthesis of varying perspectives is the best way to gain a more accurate assessment of relative truths than any one point of view alone.

The weather was balmy that afternoon. Gabriela, happily barefoot, was perched up on the front deck as we were motoring around the remote east side of Isla San Jose. She leaned over to stretch her long legs in a yoga pose, revealing her fine figure and smooth skin, and all the curves and angles of her body were framed against the luminous sea. The front of the catamaran is formed into a square front deck by means of two strong eight-foot square mesh nets suspended between the front of the boat's two long narrow hulls and the middle mast line. The taut nets make a comfortable place to read or practice yoga, or to take a nap. At the front of the catamaran, on both the port and starboard sides, a single chair is perched so as to optimize the viewing of the passing sea and wildlife while the vessel is underway. It is quite cool.

Everything appeared delightful that afternoon. From our majestic perches we regarded the placid sea, its surface like glass. The mountains of the Gulf islands and the Baja peninsula were reflected on the surface of the shimmering sea as though they were Impressionist paintings. Looking down, one could see deep into the blue green waters. And then it happened. We began to see small groups of manta rays cruising along ahead of us. Only the

small fins that protrude up on the tips of their 'wings' were visible as they swam along just under the water's surface. These manta rays had impressive wing spans about ten feet across, and we could only sigh appreciatively to try to picture manta rays that are known to grow to be more than twenty feet across. As we approached a succession of groups of these mantas, we would turn the engine off and drift close; and finally when these beautiful creatures would see our boat, they would suddenly dart down into the depths, appearing to fly like sleek Star Wars apparitions through the deep clear water.

That night, as usual with the dark skies above the Gulf, the stars of the Milky Way were brilliant. Small waves lapped past the catamaran and bioluminescent marine organisms sparkled in the water. The scene reminded me of travels I made in my heady twenties to the southwest coast of the island of Sri Lanka. Everyone I met there agreed that the bodysurfing near Hikkaduwa was the best they had ever experienced. Swells would enter a sandy palm-lined cove that was a half-mile wide, and gather momentum, rising up into perfect waves that would crash simultaneously across the entire width of the cove. The waves would propel a bodysurfer 100 feet in toward the shore before gently playing out onto the fine sand beach. One evening just after sunset I had gone bodysurfing in the warm tropical waters as a full moon rose above the coconut palms on the shoreline. As the waves crested and crashed, they lit up with phosphorescent bioluminescence, and the powerful impulse of the water propelled me along in exuberant illumination. It was, like, completely awesome! One need not cultivate a psychoactive imagination to suppose that such bioluminescence is a phenomenon that has pertained for millennia beyond counting, and that it evolved through natural processes. Praise the LORD! (Or whatever!)

I have always loved islands, especially tropical ones with white sand beaches and palm trees. Even arid islands have a strong personal appeal, especially those in the wine-dark Mediterranean Sea. Arid islands inspire passion because of the luminous clarity of dry air and the intense beauty of coastal vistas and mountainous interiors. Such islands have an immediacy of presence and a timelessness of existence. For some fascinating island insight, check out *The Astonishing Parable of Nauru* in Chapter 2 of *Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview in the Earth Manifesto* online.

Ashley is a perceptive gal with an alert awareness and good naturalist knowledge, so she often conveyed a veritable fountain of philosophy. She would look into tide pools and estuaries, and see predators and parasites and commensals and animals in symbiotic relationships, and she would comment about the riotous order of their intertwined interactions. She would upon occasion extrapolate her observations into generalized theories of existence, as if she was on the verge of confirming some grand biological 'unified field hypothesis'. In life, she noted, adversity and pain and death are inevitable, but suffering is somewhat optional. Mental suffering is, after all, partially a matter of attitude and perspective.

Ashley is an upbeat woman. She recognizes that the world in which we live is NOT what Dr. Pangloss called 'the best of all possible worlds' in Voltaire's great short story *Candide*. But she says that the potentials for positive change are great, and that we live in a world full of mystery, and one brimming with wonderful potentialities of joy, satisfaction, pleasure, effusive gratification, rapport, intoxication, humor, insight and beauty. Let it be!

### Day Five

As we continued to head back to the south, we made a morning excursion to the cliffy rock island of Los Islotes, renowned for its sea lions. I went snorkeling, and soon was engulfed in a dense school of small fish. No matter what direction I looked, all I saw was fish. I couldn't touch any of them, despite their enveloping proximity, but they moved like a flexible bubble wrap around me. They parted and coalesced in every direction with every one of my movements. It was disconcerting at first, and I became disoriented. But then I relaxed and felt as if I had become an integral part of the school. Whenever all the fish turned one way, I turned with them. A sense of belonging overcame me, and I was transported into a new intracosm, as if my brain had merged with the school. In this state, I glimpsed myself not only as a part of the school, but as an integral part of the biotic sphere of the sea, and of the planet, and of the entire grand sweep of evolutionary history that reaches far back to that time long, long, long ago when the fish and I were actually one.

Here's the part I'm trying to tell. During those moments submerged in the sea with the large school of small fish, an oceanic sense of peacefulness rippled through me, and yet at the same time I experienced a curiously primeval

rush of exhilaration. I felt subsumed by a sense of safety, and yet at the same time I was hyper-alert. It was like I was the school. Nonetheless, that primitive wily cavewoman concern came back to me, the gnawing fear that some may be eaten -- and that with my luck, it could easily be me. I suspected then how Anais Nin felt when she said, "There were always, in me, two women at least, one woman desperate and bewildered, who felt she was drowning, and another who only wanted to bring beauty, grace and aliveness to people."

Suddenly, a large sea lion startled the school of fish, and it vanished. The sea lion playfully darted at me, which was a bit scary, and I snapped out of my reverie and swam directly back to the boat. After the enervating exhilaration of this snorkeling excursion, I lay on the deck of the catamaran mesmerized by the towering fortress of white-guano-accented rock that characterizes the beautiful island of Los Islotes. Ashley read aloud to me the end of the second Chapter of Steinbeck's *Log from the Sea of Cortez*, which concludes with this compelling observation:

"We have looked into the tide pools and seen the little animals feeding and reproducing and killing for food. We name them and describe them and, out of long watching, arrive at some conclusion about their habits, so that we say, 'This species typically does thus and so.' But we do not objectively observe our own species as a species, although we know the individuals fairly well. When it seems that men may be kinder to men, that wars may not come again, we completely ignore the record of our species. If we used the same smug observation on ourselves that we do on hermit crabs, we would be forced to say, with the information at hand, 'It is one diagnostic trait of *Homo sapiens* that groups of individuals are periodically infected with a feverish nervousness which causes the individuals to turn on and destroy, not only his own kind, but the works of his own kind. It is not known whether this be caused by a virus, some airborne spore, or whether it be a species reaction to some meteorological stimulus as yet undetermined.' Hope, which is another species diagnostic trait -- the hope that this may not always be -- does not in the least change the observable past and present. When two crayfish meet, they usually fight. One would say that perhaps they might not at a future time, but without some mutation it is not likely that they will lose this trait. And perhaps our species is not likely to forego war without some psychic mutation which at present, at least, does not seem imminent. And if one places the blame for killing and destroying on economic insecurity, on inequality, on injustice, he is simply stating the proposition in another way. We have what we are. Perhaps the crayfish feels the itch of jealousy, or perhaps he is sexually insecure. The effect is that he fights. When in the world there shall come twenty, thirty, fifty years without evidence of our murder trait, under whatever system of justice or economic security, then we may have a contrasting habit pattern to examine. So far there is no such situation. So far the murder trait of our species is as regular and observable as our various sexual habits."

Yikes! Think about this. John Steinbeck wrote these words as Adolf Hitler's armies were conquering Poland and violently annexing other countries in Europe at the start of the Second World War. Equally relevantly, the United States is today embarked on its own program of harshly militaristic empire building. We are stationing hundreds of thousands of armed forces and supporting personnel in hundreds of military bases in more than 140 nations around the world, and we are engaged in absurdly costly wars abroad to ensure uninterrupted access to oil. We spent decades occupying Afghanistan and Iraq with our military and using ruthless clandestine CIA forces and 'enhanced interrogation techniques' and drone bombings in an effort to combat terrorism and achieve other overly-broad and murky goals in countries around the globe. In the intervening years between the 1940 expedition and our 2008 visit to the Sea of Cortez, ideologies of fascism and communism have been severely discredited, and triumphant capitalism has spread and been extensively propagated around the planet.

With the arrival of a new century, our rash experiment in laissez-faire capitalism is far advanced, with its stoked economic growth, profligately wasteful consumerism, industrialization, globalization, rapid increases in human numbers and anti-egalitarian abuses of power and reprehensible extremes of opportunism. A permanent war economy prevails, accompanied by huge amounts of deficit financing. This state of affairs is likely to prove to be so ill-advised that it would make economist John Maynard Keynes figuratively turn over in his grave with disapproval. Greedy profiteering and heavy borrowing and short-term expediencies and misguided priorities are leading to a crescendo of foolhardiness. This is insidiously increasing the risk of a severe debt crisis and hastening

the potential for ecological collapse, yet few people speak out boldly in strong opposition to such political gimmickry and myopically selfish short-term-oriented profit-prepossessed national policies.

The drive to control and dominate may be one of the most distinct traits of our species, but as the world population grows, resources are being depleted and it is becoming increasingly necessary for us to find ways to ensure that the conflicts that result from this propensity do not cause terrible violence and destructive wars. The outcome of such aggression will likely be ridiculously costly "Pyrrhic victories", and ignominious defeats. We should stop exacerbating inevitable conflicts, and find foolproof ways to prevent or mitigate them. We should create a cabinet-level Department of Peace and spend hundreds of billions of dollars on initiatives designed to increase fairness and social justice. We should invest heavily in cleaner alternatives to fossil fuels, and eliminate subsidies to fossil fuel and nuclear industries. We should find ways to diminish the unwarranted influence of vested interests that are causing us to march lockstep along our current course of spending trillions of dollars on wars and armaments and blockheaded efforts to perpetuate our addiction to crude oil.

I know no one, personally, who actually has the "murder trait" that John Steinbeck describes. But I sure do know many who have frustrations, insecurities, deep anxieties, suppressed anger, and the compulsion, to some degree, to control others! The ultimate expression of this control trait is almost incidentally to contribute to poverty, violence, war, oppression and murder. We need not be fatalistic about our human murder trait; we should simply recognize the compulsions that lead to injustice and violence and war, and act to prevent people from gaining power who are under its feverish spell. In any case, if we were to courageously act to eliminate the profit that the 'moneyed classes' make from war, there would likely be fewer and shorter wars.

There is powerful persuasion in these words from the great General Douglas MacArthur: "I believe that the entire effort of modern society should be concentrated on the endeavor to outlaw war as a method of the solution of problems between nations."

In our criminal justice system, we strive to prevent violent crimes by isolating and punishing people who commit murders. We should do something similar in our international relations. We should invest in peace initiatives and reinforce institutions that are designed to prevent desperation, aggression, wars and all types of terrorist acts. We should act to strengthen democratic governments and ensure that they have strong checks and balances and separations of powers in them. I believe this would help facilitate critically important goals. And we should set a better example to demonstrate that democracies really are superior forms of governance by making sure that they are flexible, resilient, fairer, strongly resistant to corruption, peaceable and immune to impulses that militate for war profiteering. We should stand resolutely against aggressively unjust usurpations of Executive powers. We should insist that Justices on the Supreme Court are reasonable and fair-minded rather than being ideologically motivated partisans. For an in-depth discussion of this issue and related ones, see *Reflections on War - and Peace*, which can be found in Part Three of the *Earth Manifesto* website.

Throughout his writing career, John Steinbeck was more concerned with biology and human nature than he was with ideology. He expressed farsighted social concern in such novels as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*. I applaud his great works and wholeheartedly salute his keen intellect, clever wit and rich literary perspective. My own idea is that ideological conceptions are powerful determinants of how biological systems fare, so we should confront narrow ideologies directly so as to move forward and reinforce strategies that are more likely to lead to a salubrious future for our kind.

The ascendancy of 'Neoconservative' dogmas in the opening years of the twenty-first century seems to have persuaded many Americans that the United States must dominate and subjugate all other nations with its economic and military prowess. This doesn't seem right to me because of the enormous injustices, high costs, hubristic hegemony, terrible risks, divisive outcomes and increased likelihood of violent conflicts and blowback retribution involved in these strategies. Our economic dominance is faltering, and the precedents we set may not appear so good, as our power fades. Preemptive wars and drone bombings of thousands of people in other countries, in particular, seem like exceedingly poor plans.

"The fact that there's a Highway to Hell and only a Staircase to Heaven should tell you something about anticipated traffic."

Competition is a powerful motivating force. Highly unfair competition, however, is socially detrimental in most of its forms, including monopoly dealings, unethical shenanigans, fraud, cheating, dishonesty, domineering abuses of power, military aggression and economic shock doctrines. John Fowles notes that capitalism "contains the seeds of its own transformation. And it is high time it started to nurture those seeds." This wise observation is contained in Fowles' book, *The Aristos*, which is his valuable "self-portrait in ideas". I heartily recommend this book; it is a seminal influence for the perspectives contained in many *Earth Manifesto* writings.

Remembering that John Steinbeck wrote *The Log From the Sea of Cortez* in 1940, consider this observation that reveals a central aspect of the capitalist system and our American representative democracy: "There is a war now which no one wants to fight, in which no one can see a gain: a zombie war of sleep-walkers which nevertheless goes on out of all control of intelligence. Some time ago a Congress of honest men refused an appropriation of several hundreds of millions of dollars to feed our people. They said, and meant it, that the economic structure of the country would collapse under the pressure of such expenditure. And now the same men, just as honestly, are devoting many billions of dollars to the manufacture, transportation, and detonation of explosives to protect the people they would not feed."

This "guns-versus-butter argument" is highly relevant today. The United States figuratively took its eye off the ball in Afghanistan to attack Iraq, with a main goal of controlling oil resources in the Middle East. This aggression constituted a misguided and arrogant mistake that is likely to eventually cost a staggering total of several trillion dollars. We have been misled, manipulated and frightened into this colossal stupidity by the lobbying and promotion efforts of a bunch of hawkish ideologues and giant corporations and deceitful politicians. The transparent motives of these people are narrowly focused on power, greed and war profiteering. Partisans in right-wing think tanks have helped achieve these goals, advancing a thinly-disguised ideological agenda. Corporate-controlled Big Media has gone along to help facilitate these wrongheaded goals. Too many of our political representatives seem to have dominion-demanding control compulsions, regressive worldviews, evangelically conservative convictions, and a willingness to act deviously and ruthlessly to get what they want.

Mary has a soft-spoken manner, expressive eyes, self-possessed confidence, and a lovely genial disposition. She is also at times quite a jokester. She scoffed about John Steinbeck's remark concerning a Congress of "honest men". Ha! For starters, the fact that institutionalized bribery is a scurrilous facet of our lobbyist-driven political decision-making processes reeks of dishonesty. Many members of Congress are almost as bad as George W. Bush when it comes to playing loose with the truth. Warren Beatty's character in the film *Bulworth* was radically honest, and such candor would be refreshing and valuable if ever it were to be honorably demonstrated by our representatives. Mark Twain famously wrote: "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class, except Congress." LOL! Let's agree to focus on changing this sad state of affairs by supporting Fair Elections and reducing the influence of Big Money in our political system.

Brobdingnagian dishonesty is a curious affliction. One of the most famous books of the eighteenth century was Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. It was a satire on the human condition as well as a parody of the popular literary genre of "travelers' tales". *Gulliver's Travels* casts a provocative perspective on fraud and deception, which both play big roles in our politics today, and these traits profoundly affect our economic and political policies and systems. It is worthwhile to ruminate about this observation by Jonathan Swift:

"They (the Lilliputians) look upon fraud as a greater crime than theft, and therefore seldom fail to punish it with death (!); for they allege that care and vigilance, with a very common understanding, may preserve a man's goods from thieves; but honesty has no fence against superior cunning: and since it is necessary that there should be a perpetual intercourse of buying and selling, and dealing upon credit, where fraud is permitted or connived at, or hath no Law to punish it, the honest dealer is always undone and the knave gets the advantage."

The culmination of these ideas brought to my mind something that perceptive Mary said one night while Shania Twain's tune, *Man! I Feel Like a Woman!*, was playing on the catamaran's compact disc player. Just at the moment that Shania was singing "I ain't gonna act politically correct", Mary expressed a simple and sensible plan. This is what she said: "First we waterboard all the 'deciders' who chose to take our country to war in Iraq: Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft, Wolfowitz, Tenet, Rove and Rice. We force them to confess in full. We find out what

happened in the year leading up to 9/11; we find out exactly what happened on 9/11; and we find out what has happened since then. We find out exactly WHY all of these things have taken place, and WHO was behind the scenes. We make sure that the stories are as consistent and accurate as possible. Then we send all of these people to The Hague for judgment."

Wow! What revelations we would learn if this was done -- the full truth instead of all those propagated lies! This would establish a good deterrent for the next batch of megalomaniacs who think that international aggression under false pretenses is a good idea. I hasten to add that Mary did not actually take credit for this idea. To be honest, she attributed it to a piece of humorous satire on the Internet. It is one of the more creative things expressed there. It is funnily irreverent, and thought provoking in proposition, and compelling in point of view, and it contains both a kernel of wisdom and a good suggestion for potential poetic justice!

"It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble.

It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

--- Mark Twain

Most people recognize that the Bush administration was exceedingly dishonest and merciless to the poor in its generous pandering to the rich. It helped create huge and growing increases in disparities of wealth between the wealthy few and all others. One of its main goals seems to have been to help increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of the richest 1% of Americans. It engaged in deceptive propaganda, fear-mongering and ruthless aggression, and also violated many international laws. It tried to socially engineer our country in reactionary and prudish right-wing directions. And it largely evaded accountability. This is why there is a ring of poetic justice to this suggestion to waterboard these "conservative" leaders. These partisan operatives are, after all, the ones who strongly defended harsh, punitive and vindictive torture tactics against people they deem to be terrorists.

Think of Sir Peter Ustinov's evocatively declaration: "Terrorism is the war of the poor, and war is the terrorism of the rich." Yow, McNow!

Martin Luther King III provided a valuable perspective on this: "We all have to be concerned about terrorism, but you will never end terrorism by terrorizing others."

(Note from December 2021: The Republican Party has become shockingly more radical since the days in 2008 that these words were first written, radical in treacherous opposition against democracy and election integrity (through gerrymandering, voter restrictions, intimidation of election officials, influence peddling and corrupt officials), and against fairness, honesty, civil rights, social responsibility, inclusion, egalitarianism, women's reproductive rights, justice and environmental sanity. I will not taint the thrust of these ideas with an attempt to include that whole negative and dangerous devolution here, but refer readers to essays in *See Clearly - Sanity During Insane Times* for better understanding.)

In March 2008, President Bush vetoed a bill approved by Congress that would have made it illegal for the CIA to waterboard prisoners. Here is a practice that is illegal for our military, yet President Bush refused to accept that such tactics should be prohibited to the CIA. Such a stance encourages abuses of power and fosters injustice, and it also stokes extremism and increases the probabilities of blowback retribution against our troops and citizens. Waterboarding, besides, is known to produce unreliable information.

Executive privilege has its perks, and White House executives claim that secrecy and immunity to accountability are among them. The powerful are, of course, rarely charged or tried in court. Whenever they see that accountability is coming, they try to grant retroactive immunity to themselves in advance. Nonetheless, supposedly watertight ideologies of hawkish Neoconservatives have sprung leaks and are sinking like the Titanic. Conservatives seem to advise that we proceed full speed ahead in treacherous waters. From the wrongheaded priorities of the Global Gag Rule and tax breaks for the rich, and subsidies for Big Oil and Big Coal, to the injudicious offensives of military interventionism and domineering empire and torture tactics, our ideals of "liberty and justice for all" have been under concerted assault. We are clearly seeing the disastrous results.

Three of us gals had a spirited discussion about patriotism. Mark Twain once declared, "My kind of patriotism and loyalty is loyalty to one's country, and not to one's institutions or officeholders." None of us believed that citizens



should adopt an uncritical attitude of 'my country, right or wrong'. We all unanimously agreed that it was a dangerous and stupid simplification to say, "You're either with us or against us." None of us was particularly happy with the cowboy bravado of declaring, "Bring 'em on" and having our soldiers sent abroad as pawns to shoulder the burden of fighting in sectarian struggles.

It's hard enough trying to figure out the truth of things in the natural world; or true things about oneself. So it's absurd to allow shrewd, coldly calculating, unethical and self-interest-obsessed politicians to foist their doctrinaire worldviews on us, and to deceive us, and to dominate our lives with corrupt economic systems and wars and insider profiteering and regressive social policies. Oh, right, right, right; Sure, all our leaders claim they are just trying to do their best, and to do what is strictly in the public interest. They are apparently convinced that, without repressive control, things just might spiral out of their control, and the small fraction of people who own 50% of all assets in the world might find that things are not to their privileged liking.

These words may sound cynical, but I am veritably optimistic in my skepticism with regard to these cynicism-engendering times! Mark Twain expressed great contempt for entrenched interest groups that defraud the public. He despised politicians who did the bidding of vested interests by playing on uncertainty and fear to promote profiteering by what has subsequently become known as the military-industrial complex.

On board our catamaran, Carrie was the only self-professed 'conservative'. She was the only one to express the conviction that our leaders generally act with good intentions, and that they fight the 'war on terror' to make us safe; that tax breaks for the rich are the trickle-down best plan; that our society cannot possibly afford universal healthcare; that insurance companies and drug companies and huge fossil fuel conglomerates simply must be allowed to continue to maximize their profits, no matter how harmful such privileges are to people's well-being and the greater good; that making polluters pay for the harm they do would be too much of a corporate hardship; that most government regulations are bureaucratic red tape, and thus really bad; that pay-as-you-go plans are quaintly old-fashioned; that immigrants are dangerous people who threaten our well-being; and that the economy would be unacceptably harmed if we were to pass effective laws that serve to limit the amount of carbon dioxide that is being spewed into the atmosphere. I think, in any case, that she stood for these things. We tended to generally avoid topics like this, because the calm waters of our enjoyable journey were not conducive to such tension-filled debates.

It seems to me, in retrospect, that skepticism is well advised with regard to 'conservative' viewpoints. Transformative worldviews are needed, and they should be accompanied by boldly progressive social action. Dissent in the face of imperial abuses of power is actually the most patriotic attitude. This has been the way of the American people since long before the Declaration of Independence. When the leaders of a nation exploit and deceive and oppress the people, as the British did to Americans in the Colonies before the Revolutionary War, and as George W. Bush and Dick Cheney have done from 2001 through 2008, they betray the trust of people in their government. Such leaders deserve to be strongly opposed. Patriots should not blindly act like sheepish followers, and they should instead side with those who advocate courageous and caring shepherding of the hapless flock, which is being fleeced by ruthless rulers and capitalists.

Governments should fear the people in a democracy, rather than the people being made to perpetually fear the government. The government should obey rules of law and the U.S. Constitution, as well as international codes of conduct like the Nuremberg Principles that concern aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Our government should honor its true purposes and charter, and refrain from abusing its power to suit vested interests at the expense of the public. And *We the People* should soundly reject charlatans and demagogues and corrupt politicians.

Government should honestly prioritize its energies and the spending of taxpayer monies to ensure the overall security and well-being of the people. It should act as a fair-minded referee with regard to all conflicts of interest, and thus help ensure there is greater equality of opportunity and justice. And it should refrain from interfering in people's private lives and personal liberties, and in basic human rights and freedoms to choose how to live, as long as they respect natural constraints of Golden Rule ethics.

The years of American "sole superpower Neocon dominion" are a shameful stain on our submissive souls. We have kowtowed to arrogance and lies, and accepted torture tactics, as if we believe powerful people are entitled to play God. Those who oppose this ruthless ideological hegemony have been treated with harsh vindictiveness and jealously self-righteous repression.

'Good guys' and 'bad guys' do not always wear the customary white hats and black hats. An infinite array of examples can be adduced that show that right and wrong, and even good and bad, are relative. Readers of John Steinbeck's novel *Cannery Row* were surprised by observations made by the book's central character that the traits leading to success in society are often vices such as greed, meanness, egotism and self-interest; and that traits leading to failure may be a result of virtues like kindness, honesty, openness and generosity. Go figure! How mangled and crazy is this?

"I was gratified to be able to answer promptly, and I did. I said I didn't know."

--- Mark Twain

We gals tended to sympathize with criticisms of conventional values of materialism and consumerism and prudishness that are expressed by John Steinbeck's characters in *Cannery Row*. We found that we agreed with perspectives that extol values like friendship, pleasure and ease, and even a fair modicum of sense gratification. We respected the inquisitive nature, avid reading and intense curiosity of Doc Ricketts, and appreciated his bohemian attitudes toward life, meaning and identity. We loved the visionary ideas that John Steinbeck cultivated, and his embrace of live-and-let-live philosophies. We discovered that we yearned for a simpler and more harmonious balance in the world, one that we imagined to be similar to that embraced by wise nature-loving Taoist sages, whose 'Three Jewels of the Tao' emphasize what is proper and ethical in human society -- compassion, moderation and humility.

*Cannery Row* is more than a comic novel filled with eccentric characters. "It is about life as it is", according to a scholar at the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas. "A complex stew."

"Civilization is the limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities."

--- Mark Twain

We appreciated seeing the wild exuberance of life and the abundance of marine animals in the Sea of Cortez, but they were revealingly already suffering significant damage even back in 1940. Steinbeck wrote in particular about dredging operations by a Japanese fishing fleet that scraped the bottom of all forms of life, incidentally killing and discarding tons of fish and rays in their quest for shrimp. The world's fishing fleets have made rashly more damaging inroads against fish and other marine animals since those days. In addition, new threats in the form of pollution and an increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and related ocean acidification and the unfolding destabilization of the global climate, are now threatening fisheries, coral reefs, aquatic nurseries and many forms of life.

The Ricketts/Steinbeck expedition itself had collected a large quantity of animals for scientific purposes during their trip, and they had wantonly harpooned a fair number of manta rays and sharks. Yikes! 'Que lastimal! We felt smug that our own murdering had been limited to only one small fish that Carrie, our sole fisherman on board, had managed to catch. The brunt of our slaughter had been done by suppliers in grocery stores, and consisted of some chickens, prawns, a cow, some fish and a bountiful variety of vegetables, fruits and grains. Our food shopping in La Paz had been done by the three of us who were in charge of cuisine for the trip, and the madcap excursion through the large Mexican grocery store, where \$700 bought three towering shopping carts full of food and beverages, had been an experience like a frenetic episode of Keystone Cops.

Hunting and gathering are hard-wired into our beings, yet it would not have occurred to any one of us to try to harpoon the beautiful manta rays. Times have changed since 1940, and the ethical Zeitgeist has changed with them. We have come to recognize the dire threats posed to wildlife and wilderness areas, and a new ethic now affects us: "Take only memories and photographs, and leave only footprints." (We did collect some lovely seashells, but virtuosity does have its limits!)

The Sea of Cortez Foundation lists many species that are endangered or threatened in this 'breeding ground for the Pacific Ocean', and it wisely advocates long-range social and economic policy changes to save them. Good idea! Such macrocosmic ideas seem preferable to more narrowly focused ideas that are "microcosmic", and they are vastly more important than exploitive, destructive and shortsighted expedencies.

Ponder for a moment John Steinbeck's words, independent of their original 1940 context (which had to do with thoughtless discipline of 'the military mind'): "We wonder ... whether the paradoxes of our times are not finally mounting to a conclusion of ridiculousness that will make the whole structure collapse. For the paradoxes are becoming so great that leaders of people must be less and less intelligent to stand their own leadership."

Our human house of cards has not yet collapsed in the many decades that have elapsed since John Steinbeck wrote these words, despite some devastating wars and a furious on-going assault upon Earth's resources and ecosystems, and a tripling of human numbers. Perhaps we will have another generation or so before we are dealt a devastating blow by resource depletion, wasteful consumerism, stimulated economic bubbles, mounting debt, the degradation of the environmental commons, climate disruptions, wars of aggression or stubborn resistance to progressive reforms and salubrious change. Who knows?

An old political cartoon comes to mind in which two fishermen in a boat on a lake see atomic-bomb mushroom clouds in the distance. One says to the other, "You know what this means, don't you? -- Damn the size restrictions, and screw the limits!" Ha! Here we are, collectively faced with daunting existential challenges, aware of threatening clouds on the horizon, and instead of courageously trying to cope in more effective ways with the threats, we say, "Screw the limits, party on! -- let's cling ever-more stubbornly to our habits, routines, lifestyles, wasteful ways, conflicting identity politics and the status quo."

But a paradigm shift is clearly possible. Dramatic changes in worldviews are definitely within the realm of possibility; they have, after all, taken place many times in history. Usually such changes require a terrible crisis that makes a radical new course overwhelmingly necessary. Humanity today has an increasingly urgent need for a new paradigm shift: one that is intentionally chosen, enlightened and far-sighted, and one that emphasizes ecologically sane understandings on a global scale. This new way of seeing things should feature a bold and honest embrace of the salubrious triumvirate of sane humanitarian goals: fairness, peaceable coexistence and the sustainability of our aggregate activities. These goals should be given overarching national priority, not just rhetorical nods or 'greenwashing' while the status quo continues to be perpetuated.

We are entering a new era in the annals of human civilization. We have used more resources in the last 100 years than in all of the previous history and prehistory of our species' existence. It took the human race well over 100,000 years to become as numerous as 1 billion people, in the year 1800. We doubled that to 2 billion within the next 130 years. And then we tripled this number by the year 2000, reaching a population of 6 billion only 70 years after we had reached 2 billion. The seventh billion was added in only a little more than 12 years.

In the arid climes of the Sea of Cortez, one is reminded continuously that the story of the American West is a story of a relentless quest for precious resources of fresh water. It is a tale of rivers diverted and dammed, of billion-dollar battles over water rights, of political corruption and intrigue, and of ecological and economic disaster. In *Cadillac Desert*, Marc Reisner writes of early settlers, who were lured by the promise of paradise, and of ruthless tactics employed by Los Angeles business interests and politicians to ensure the city's growth. The author documents the bitter rivalry between two government giants, the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in the rash competition to transform the West.

Water policy in the U.S. is actually a form of financial vandalism of the future that has helped make us rich but our descendants more insecure. *Cadillac Desert* shows, in matter of fact ways, the devastating effectiveness of what happens when the worst nightmares of conservatives (i.e., Big Government) and liberals (the corruption of government by Big Business) combine to rape our environment while simultaneously bilking taxpayers out of billions of dollars, with the wrongheaded purpose of virtually giving away water rights to giant agribusinesses and other special interest groups.

Global environmental conditions will continue to deteriorate as increasing numbers of greedy and ever-more needy

people haunt both prime and marginal habitats, and as they unsustainably over-exploit the areas in which they live. A main characteristic of prime living areas will increasingly be *the availability of adequate supplies of fresh water*. Droughts will affect more and more people as climate change really kicks into high gear with insidiously increasing concentrations of heat-trapping gases in Earth's atmosphere.

The Coachella Valley area where Palm Springs is located has something like 124 golf courses, so it has one of the largest concentrations of golf courses in the world. Palm Springs exists in an arid rain shadow of high mountains with very little annual precipitation and rarely flowing streams, so it gets its water by pumping it out from hundreds of wells that draw heavily from a large underground aquifer. This wanton pumping has led to declines in groundwater levels, posing serious long-term risks of inadequate fresh water supplies.

The price assessed for pristine water from the aquifer beneath the Palm Springs area is significantly less for golf courses than for residential uses. This is a perverse incentive that simply doesn't make sense because it encourages myopically wasteful uses of water.

Water managers and hydrologists often liken underground aquifers to bank accounts in which there are deposits and withdrawals. Viewed this incisive way, users of Coachella Valley's aquifer have been reckless in overspending for many years. Depletion of groundwater has been a slow-moving crisis in which water levels have dropped by more than 100 feet since the 1950s in some areas of Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage where many golf courses and large upscale houses are located.

Groundwater pumping in California is not regulated by federal, state or local governments. Scientists say that for most areas of the country, complete data on how much water has been used and how much remains underground do not exist. In this case, ignorance is definitely not bliss!

A joint U.S. and German mission named the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment is known by the acronym GRACE. Launched in 2002, GRACE consists of two satellites that fly in separate orbits about 136 miles apart. The satellites monitor slight changes over time in Earth's gravitational pull that occur when large amounts of water appear as snow or rain, or disappear due to groundwater pumping or drought.

Data from the GRACE satellites provides an important tool for studying Earth's geology and climate. The twin GRACE satellites, nicknamed "Tom" and "Jerry", circle the globe in tandem 15 times a day, and as they do, the satellites measure Earth's gravitational field very precisely. These measurements even enable a better understanding of many things like ocean surface currents and ocean heat transport. The GRACE mission is able, among other goals, to measure and monitor changes in the storage of water and snow on the continents, and to create a color-coded map to reflect findings.

"This is the global picture and it's bad," said hydrologist Jay Famiglietti, a professor at UC Irvine and director of the UC Center for Hydrologic Modeling, referring to water maps produced. "All those red spots are hotspots of groundwater depletion that are happening all over the world: northwestern Australia, the North China Plain, northwestern India, Bangladesh, the Middle East and various regions around Africa."

Much of California is covered in yellow or orange, showing that the state has been losing freshwater in the past decade. "The fresh water future in California is just not bright, and we have to come to terms with that and begin actively managing our groundwater supplies for sustainability, for the future," Famiglietti said. "We're using the water at a much quicker rate than it's being replenished, so the level of the water in the aquifer drops and ultimately we will hit bottom." He and other researchers say that on top of heavy groundwater pumping for farms and growing urban populations, water supplies in much of the West are becoming less reliable due to climate change.

Prolonged drought has pushed reservoirs on the Colorado River to new lows, leaving them half empty and prompting water managers to respond with a plan to reduce the flow of water from Lake Powell to Lake Mead. The Colorado River has long since ceased to flow to the Gulf of California due to the complete diversion of its drainage from the Rocky Mountains.

Conservation measures in the California desert have lagged behind those of some other parts of the Southwest. "The board of directors, the city council, the leaders, need to overcome denial. Because nobody is going to ring the alarm bell and put a stop to the uncontrolled growth in the valley, unless they're very courageous," said Manny

Rosas, a retired water resources manager. "It's very difficult for people in government to sound the alarm bell, even though all the facts are there."

Manny Rosas indicates that more needs to be done to adopt "smart growth" policies, and to give greater consideration to water supply limits. He suggests turning down some proposals for housing subdivisions and requiring new developments to use filtered Colorado River water rather than pumping from wells. Bold measures are required as serious drought affects the region.

Americans have an 'ecological footprint' right now that is so large that it would take five planet Earths to be sustainable. Europeans would require three planets. These words do not carry the weight of their certain implications: there is only ONE planet Earth. We will simply be unable to continue our growth-addicted ways, our wanton consumerism, our extravagant borrowing, our encouragement of speculation, our poorly controlled heavy spending on the military, and policies opposed to family planning, and unfair profiteering at the expense of people and the environment. I suppose it is more accurate to say that we CAN continue these courses of action, because as sure as shootin' we are doing so in every nation around the globe. But we do so at an increasing risk of calamity and hardship beyond imagination. We are not just facing mere economic recessions! For greater insight, check out the film, *A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash*.

We need to honestly address these challenges, and seek real solutions. We should choose priorities that are smarter and saner and more holistic. NOW is the time to act! Conflicts over oil, fresh water, territory and dominance will inevitably intensify as the human population continues its growth beyond all sustainable bounds. Competing interests -- all of them -- should be brought together to cooperate in defining and implementing changes for the greater good in the long run. And effective steps should be taken to marginalize extremism, divisive politics and religious fundamentalism.

Our desultory conversations aboard the boat occasionally sounded like a *Jane Austin Book Club*, but instead of relationship discussions like those the female characters engage in, in *Sex in the City*, and idle gossip and personal angst, we were much more concerned with the zest for life and spiritual issues and larger existential questions. I had met Grace, one of my oldest friends, when she was 12 years old. Today at the age of 48 (in 2009), she is still curvy, fit, slender and young at heart. She has traveled extensively and has an outgoing personality, so she communicates easily with those she meets. She is exceptionally well read, and she delighted us by bringing along on our boat afloat on the Sea of Cortez both a copy of John Steinbeck's *Log* and printouts of the entire entries from Wikipedia for three of the greatest American authors -- Ernest Hemingway, Jack London and John Steinbeck.

In the context of these readings and conversations, further reflections came to us concerning the curious behavioral traits of our species. We knew that everyone is influenced by genetic inheritance and biological exigencies and social conditioning. Powerful inner forces (archetypes) and compelling outer forces (stereotypes) shape our behaviors and influence our emotions, yet we all seem to have some degree of free will. We have the power to choose enlightened awareness over myth and ideology. We collectively have some influence over the choice of having a society that is fair or unfair, and over our nation's choices in pursuing war or peace. We have the capabilities to alter our habits, and to support courses of action that are more sustainable.

We are inhibited from choosing such courses of action by persuasive advertising, manipulative conditioning, retrogressive influences, deceptive propaganda, perverse incentives, cultivated fear, ignorance, divide-and-conquer strategies, selfish greed, and shortsighted materialistic compulsions. These powerful forces militate for the unrestricted exploitation of resources, and for activities that are ecologically devastating. We simply must find ways to transcend these things, for surely they are proving to be riskily unsustainable!

Each and every individual has characteristics that we judge to be 'virtues' and 'vices'. We have virtues like generosity, kindness, humility, prudence, hope, patience, diligence, compassion, faith, love, mercy, cooperative spirit, loyalty and a sense of the moral good. We also have vices like avarice, envy, jealousy, anger, arrogance, vanity, gluttony, narrow-mindedness, bitterness, hate, vindictiveness and pride. There is, incidentally, a situational relativity of context in which any vice can be regarded as a virtue, and vice versa; but that's a different and more complicated matter, and a longer story. An objective naturalist from another planet would conclude, after studying

our species, that human traits are complex and conflicted, and that we are a veritable 'two-legged paradox'. We are creatures of habit, but we are also malleable, versatile, resilient and capable of being eminently adaptive.

NOW is the time to be flexible! The whole goal for humanity, as we move forward into a future filled with profound existential risks, should be to strengthen our institutions -- economic, social, religious, and political -- so that they encourage positive activities and behaviors, and discourage negative ones. We should take all human propensities into account in acting to restructure our societies in ways that are fairer and more likely sustainable. We should mitigate injustice and ecological insanity, and act to prevent wars. We should create more equity and peace in world affairs. And we need to ensure that the products we consume include all costs incurred in producing them, including adequate provisions for workers who produce them and the health of the environment in which they are produced.

Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*, defines Politics as: "A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage." Perhaps we need, above all, to redefine the political good! On that thought, I drifted off to sleep.

### Day Six

In the morning the decks were wet, as if a miraculous rain had fallen, but clearly it was only a heavy dew. On this sixth day of our trip, calm and relaxed, I was alone, jotting down a few thoughts in the berth that I shared with Grace. The *Gato de Cortez* has adequate sleeping space for 8 people, all of which is within earshot of the surprisingly spacious dining table and galley area. A loud peal of Gabriela's happy laughter caught my attention, and I heard someone say, "Don't be cute!" I chuckled to myself; tell the songbirds not to sing!

Natalie and Mary were talking spiritedly about the occasion when Pope Benedict visited Latin America in May 2007. He had created a firestorm of criticism by declaring that the 'evangelization' of the New World during the colonial era DID NOT represent an imposition of a foreign culture on the indigenous peoples. Really? What ridiculous spin was that?! After all, in some places only a small fraction of the original inhabitants survived the economic, cultural and authoritarian hegemony of the colonizers and the diseases they brought with them. Indigenous groups of people from Mexico all the way south to Chile condemned the remarks as a revision of history that in actuality was marked by massacres, enslavement and the destruction of native cultures. Mary sarcastically parodied the Pope, saying, "Spiritually, it was a win for us. We're calling it a win."

Mary had been brought up a good Catholic girl, but she had been disillusioned by the propensity of the Church to desperately cling to absurd dogmas and hypocritically support the relegation of women to second-class roles in society. Later she became disgruntled by the Church's discrimination against gay people and its support of priests who had reprehensibly betrayed the trust of their flocks by sexually molesting young boys and girls. Glory be to God! Despite her cynicism related to the authoritarian and undemocratic Catholic Church, Mary had become a remarkably sensible and free spirited gal with an agnostic outlook and one of the most honorable, sensitive, enthusiastic, genuine, spiritual and beautiful dispositions of anyone I've ever known. Yay for Mary!

I exalt Virgil's wise observation, "We make our destinies by the gods we choose", and for a very good reason: it is clearly contrary to holistic self-understanding to regard God as a tripartite divinity consisting of a Father, a Son and a Holy Ghost while relegating to inferior status the equally divine aspects of the Mother, the Daughter and the Holy Feminine Spirit in us all. By distorting the fullness of existence, the Church commits a blasphemy against holistic equanimity, fair-mindedness, progress, equality of human rights, healthy community, common sense and auspicious evolutionary adaptation.

Religious establishments are, to a large extent, fundamentally concerned with control, power and money. These unholy motives eclipse the rhetorical commitments they make to compassion, liberation, fairness, spiritual truths, honest guidance, the moral good, and respectable foresight. While we seek salvation from sins, as judged by archaic commandments and twisted patriarchal mores, we oddly ignore the ultimate crime we are collectively committing by fleecing folks in the future and mindlessly depriving them of the real underpinnings of health, prosperity, fiscal responsibility and true well-being.

None of us gals was a Buddhist, but most of us felt a kinship to inclusive philosophic viewpoints of great human beings like the Dalai Lama. I encourage readers to check out Chapter #95 - The Dalai Lama and Wholesome Values, for an insightful perspective on this. It can be found in the Earth Manifesto's *Comprehensive Global Perspective - An Illuminating Worldview*.

No one aboard our vessel was a religious fundamentalist, so not a single one of us applauded sexual abstinence as either a praise-the-Lord valuable social goal or a personal honor. Intimacy and sexuality can be amongst the most beautiful expressions of love and soul connection, so it is really rather sad that prudish patriarchal drives of right-wing elements of the world's religions have created words of 'a living God' that manipulate and repress such potentially sublime forms of communication and connection. *Deliver Us from Evil!* (Check out the eye-opening film by that name.)

"I generally avoid temptation, unless I can't resist it."

--- Mae West

"The trouble with resisting temptation is that you may not get another chance!"

--- Edwin Chapin

Other philosophic speculations came to us in our leisurely state of mind afloat on the Sea of Cortez. This is an un plagiarized fact. One such idea was that every person should feel free to believe in whatever God they like, and to be whoever and whatever they want, as long as they observe the fairness principles of the Golden Rule. All governments should give recognition to the freedom of religion as one of the most fundamental of human rights. There should be no repression or interference by any government with the natural human propensity to affiliate with religious beliefs. Nor should governments be allowed to favor one religion or set of religious doctrines over another. No one should be allowed to force their beliefs on others, just as no one should be allowed to deprive a lame man of crutches that help him make his way in the world.

Everyone should feel completely free to believe in whatever God or spirit or animating force in the Universe that they imagine. It is senseless to argue and fight over whose God is the real right one, for surely the ultimate force in the Universe is singularly above conformity to human interpretations and indoctrinations and ideologies. All descriptions of this force can only relate to aspects of a single overarching 'entity' or reality.

Everyone should be able to choose whatever cosmological conception they like, to accompany their religious and spiritual beliefs. But our suppositions about Creation and a 'Creator' should be constrained by what actually is, and we should not deny geophysical evidence. Everyone should remember to include in his or her beliefs about Creation the first nine billion years or so during which matter hurtled through space, as if away from some Big Bang event, before our solar system and home planet formed.

Evidence in the form of light arriving at every instant from trillions of burning masses, all of them at different distances from us, confirms the fact that hurtling matter and speeding light and an endless continuum of time are incontrovertible aspects of the Universe's existence. In the Milky Way Galaxy alone, there are something like 200 billion stars flinging through space in a swirling spiral of galactic matter. Each such star is a Sun in its own solar system, and each has its own particular orbiting assemblage of planets, moons, asteroids, comets and the like. The whole shebang, including countless other galaxies, is in a process of observable and nearly eternal physical expansion across the 'Heavens'.

"Our opinions do not really blossom into fruition until we have expressed them to someone else."

--- Mark Twain

Philosophic speculation seems to make one hungry, for our appetites bordered on ravenous during the voyage, and we ate exceptionally well, thanks to the talented amateur cooks among us who are connoisseurs of flavorful foods. Gabriela was a big help in the galley, being an expert chef. She made delicious *sopa de tortilla* for dinner again that night. She sautéed some onions and then boiled two whole chickens into a hearty and spicy broth, and served the soup with those same yummy toppings (sharp cheddar cheese, avocado slices, crispy strips of corn tortilla, fresh cilantro and a squeeze of lime juice). Those who make hearty soups know that there is a simple alchemy by which onions, vegetables, spices, herbs and chicken stock can be transformed into one of the most healthful and

satisfying of foods. There must be a metaphor in here somewhere for living the good life and making positive transformations! (The recipe for this soup can be found online on the Earth Manifesto website; see *Twelve Delicious Recipes for Good Health and Gourmet Appreciation*. Vegetarians may eliminate the chicken and substitute a spicy cilantro corn broth for the chicken broth with equally tasty results.)

Nature's own recipe for our beautiful planet is extravagantly displayed in this dramatic part of the world. The Baja peninsula that lies to the west of the clear waters of the Sea of Cortez has a rocky spine of ruggedly steep mountains featuring many colorfully-hued and horizontally-striped layers of exposed sedimentary rock. The geological history of the Baja is fascinating. According to the *Cruising Guide to the Waters of Baja California*, "Some 20 million years ago a geological shift took place causing the Baja to break away from the mainland of Mexico. As the peninsula split away, it moved slowly northwestward, leaving some of the larger islands as debris in the present day Sea of Cortez, or Gulf of California as it is officially named."

The Gulf of California has opened up in response to tectonic forces along a fault system that extends up through California and north into the Pacific Ocean near the city of San Francisco. The most famous of these tectonic faults is the San Andreas Fault that roughly separates the North American plate from the Pacific plate. Slippage along the San Andreas Fault on April 18, 1906 caused the Point Reyes Peninsula on the Pacific Plate to leap almost twenty feet northward in an instant. The devastating seismic shock waves that this plate movement engendered are still collectively known as the 'Big One' in California.

The evidence that there have been countless 'big ones' over the eons can be seen in this gulf, where undersea canyons have been created that are more than a mile deep. This has occurred in a relatively short period of geologic time -- less than 1% of Earth's long history. The north end of the Gulf is shallow, with its basement rocks being covered by more than 25,000 feet of sediments deposited by the Colorado River. This deposition took place back before engineers dammed the river in many places and prevented its waters from even reaching the Gulf today.

It is illuminating to observe the Baja's sculpted rock formations and the effects of uplift and erosion that have created mountain ridges, outwash plains and sandy beaches on both the peninsula and the islands offshore. Geologists tell us that sediments deposited on lake bottoms and seafloors undergo a process called lithification in which deep layers of sediments are transformed into solid rock over periods of millions of years. Eventual uplift and then continuous weathering of exposed rock take place over such a long sweep of time that it cannot be fully fathomed.

The top of Mt. Everest in the Himalayas, for instance, has distinct layers of marine limestone that formed many millions of years ago on the bottom of the Indian Ocean. In a process known as 'biological precipitation', countless tiny calcium-shelled marine organisms accumulated as they died over the passing eons. The deep sediments so formed were altered into rock through the effects of compaction, pressure, heat and chemical cementation. Then, when the subcontinent of India began to collide with Tibet on the Eurasian tectonic plate, the former seafloor between the continents was uplifted, earthquake by earthquake, until it has become the world's highest mountain range.

At a time in history where any individual can know accurate scientific understandings of the natural world better than ever before, it is curious that shallow understandings and mystical explanations and religious dogmas and reactionary ideologies and various forms of denial can have such persistent influence. It is as if ignorance has some bizarre survival value. Why is critical thinking so easily undermined by propaganda, spin and emotional hijacking? Why are manipulative forces so strong that, as author Susan Jacoby puts it, they are able to "define dumbness downward". We will see. Scientists, with their telescopes and microscopes and other spiffy precise scientific instruments and methods reveal reality in a bright light that cannot be denied with impunity, or ignored indefinitely.

I make a soft, sibilant sound that is generally effective in attracting the immediate attention of any nearby dogs. It is beginning to appear that ecologist Garret Hardin may have been right when he somewhat cynically asserted: "Natural selection favors the forces of psychological denial." Individuals and businesses that deny facts about damages to common resources, and about the undesirable rapid depletion of these assets, can gain



narrow self-interested benefits in the short term. Unfortunately, these gains are realized at the expense of society as a whole.

--- *Common Sense Revival* observation, years later

My good friend the underground Mole, snug in his cozy home, communicates his pithy and somewhat eccentric wisdom: "Roiled by the vicissitudes of fate and the machinations of the entitled folks, the little guys squirm with anxious cares and try to drown their sorrows with a bottle or a joint." Still, he astutely observes, there is a simple way to satisfy the needs and forestall the motivations that cause people to indulge in such compensatory indulgences: "*Improve reality!*" (An excellent call.)

Ideas such as these arose on the Sea of Cortez in part because of the clarity of the night sky and the awesome rhythm of existence revealed in the stars and the amazing forms of life living out their lives in this wild area of our home planet. Such a state of clarity of conception might just as easily be inspired by a mind-liberating sequence of songs created by a passionate jazz virtuoso, or by a religious revelation born of some traumatic experience. As the 'boss' in Nikos Kazantzakis' novel *Zorba the Greek* once noted, "Two equally steep and bold paths may lead to the same peak." The boss in *Zorba* struggles with philosophical concepts while writing a manuscript on the life of Buddha, and he learns to love Zorba, a contrasting soul who was simple, sensual, voracious, practical and down-to-earth, a "real man".

Sometimes there is a natural serendipity of cause and effect. On these occasions, the unintended consequences of activities may actually turn out to be auspicious. Don't you love it when this happens? How sweet it is! Consider, for instance, the circumstances that surrounded a tuna fishery that John Steinbeck describes in his *Log from the Sea of Cortez*. The fishermen of Cabo San Lucas, the town that lies on the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula, once caught large quantities of tuna. The fish were canned in a cannery on the pier, and the fish guts and cuttings of the tuna were thrown into the bay from the end of the pier. This refuse brought in schools of small fish, which were then netted and used for bait to catch more tuna. Voila, a closed circle, and perfectly fortuitous good luck!

There was, however, a proverbial fly in this otherwise "perfect ecological ointment". The schools of small fish were driven away from the pier by big gangly black birds called cormorants that dive into the bay to catch the small fish. "Thus", writes Steinbeck, "they are considered interlopers, radicals, subversive forces against the perfect and God-set balance on Cape San Lucas. And they are rightly slaughtered, as all radicals should be. As one of our number remarked, <Why, pretty soon they'll want to vote.>"

Steinbeck scholars indicate that the modest, soft-spoken author was sensitive to creatures being considered subversives for a cogent personal reason: his early novels had achieved great fame, and this had brought him notoriety, hate mail and surveillance by the FBI. The literary themes in his great novels like *The Grapes of Wrath* were unsettling to privileged people, who disliked anyone pointing out the far-reaching social problems related to poor people, workers, economic inequities, the failings of dog-eat-dog capitalism, and the plight of farm laborers and immigrants. Great literature evokes universal themes and images, so it provides a deeper context in which readers can more viscerally understand. Subversive it may sometimes be, but vitally valuable!

Artists serve society in culturally important ways. Writers and filmmakers in particular provide insights and appreciations of nuance, complexity and paradox that help us find our way. Intellectuals and artists have often in history been oppressed by religious and political leaders who use authoritarian means to obtain their ends. This oppression is undertaken because ideas and visionary insights are powerful, and are therefore capable of undermining authorities and reining in their ambitions, even serving as a modest check on excessive abuses of power by the ruling Establishment. By seeking truth, and not merely conforming to orthodoxy, creative people help us transcend manipulative forces. This makes such people crucially important members of our societies. Imagine what kind of societies and cultures we might develop if we boldly encouraged creative people, instead of allowing them to be repressed!

My observations in *Earth Manifesto* soliloquies have consistently expressed a passionate conviction that we can choose to progress or to regress, and that our best hope is to adapt through progressive social and cultural evolution. We are capable of choosing much more rapid adaptive change than can take place through the biological processes of genetic mutation and natural selection. Cultural evolution and visionary reforms and bold

restructuring are our best hopes for achieving the necessary goals of coping more fairly, peaceably and sustainably. Therein lie our best hopes for salvation!

Economic inequalities and injustices may be common characteristics of human social groups, but salubrious changes to our current systems and habits and behaviors are possible. More positive outcomes for the greater good are within the reach of our choosing. We should stop allowing ourselves to be ruled by shrewd exploiters, excessively greedy opportunists and our instinctual dark sides, as demonstrated in our ruthlessly competitive natures and belligerence in control and aggression. We should wisely choose leaders that recognize these understandings. And we should prevent leaders from gaining power who are, in actual effect, uncaring about the greater good, who want to go backwards, whose primary focus is on achieving self-serving objectives and promoting the interests of rich people, or who too often exhibit reactionary conservative impulses.

We gals had paid for 'carbon credits' that were theoretically sufficient to offset the amount of carbon dioxide emissions generated by our airplane flights and boat engine. We were not so naïve as to be convinced that this action fully offset our impacts on the environment, but it made us feel better about the simple extravagance of our enjoyment. Those of us who had insisted on buying these credits felt that all consumer spending should include similar harm-mitigating costs. A 'green' initiative to implement such a cost-internalizing goal is unlikely to happen soon, even though such a strategy would valuably shift spending patterns into more sensible and responsible ones. This would reshape our consumer behaviors, and make markets more rational, and lead to activities that are more sustainable -- which is really the only tenable strategy in the long term.

Corporate lobbyists and persons in entrenched interest groups strive to prevent such initiatives from being implemented. They "greenwash" their activities, but often oppose serious reforms, rather than supporting them. To alter this undesirable state of affairs, we need publicly financed Clean Money in elections and other democracy reforms that reduce the unwarranted influence of rich people and corporate lobbyists. I'm still scratching my head at how stupid it is for our political representatives to have moved the 2008 Farm Bill forward without reducing large subsidies to giant agribusinesses, which were making record profits. This seems so foolish, just like other policies that facilitate boom-and-bust bubble economics and speculative excesses, taxpayer bailouts, profiteering by Big Oil and war services industries, inflation in the costs of food and other necessities, and healthcare insurance company profit-maximizing at the expense of people's health and lives. Change? Candidates, here are some good places to start!

'Conservatives' achieved a type of paradigm shift from the heady days of liberality in the 1960s by using effective organization and the influence of right-wing think tanks to achieve narrow objectives. Ronald Reagan promoted a costly military build-up, trickle-down economics, and fiscally irresponsible deficit spending. These short-term oriented policies have morphed into a wrong-headed bastard offspring in the form of empire-building Neoconservatism and an endless "war on terror" and new rounds of rashly regressive tax cuts to benefit high-income earners, and even more mindlessly materialistic pursuits of possessions and power. This has created a retrogressive paradigm shift, but now more than ever we need progress, not narrow partisan regress.

Everything is hitched together, so any starting point and any moment is equally good for beginning to head in the right direction. 'We'll see', says the proverbial Zen master. My mind wandered to the marvelous migrations of animals. Even a little knowledge of migrations of whales, birds, butterflies and grazing animals inspires one with great wonder. How could this fortuitous survival response have come to be? How have learned behaviors been encoded so that they are transmitted from an innovative individual response into an instinctual genetic predisposition? Even neuroscientists and geneticists struggle to explain such mysteries!

### Day Seven

Gabriela was up early, making coffee and preparing eggs with chilies, potatoes and avocados for breakfast. After satisfying our appetites, we went ashore to explore Isla Partida. As we hiked up a boulder-strewn arroyo, Ashley told me about her early experiences with Werner Erhard and the human potentials movement known as *est*. She talked about some of the ideas she had been exposed to, and here is the essence of what she said: "Change causes upset, so it is generally resisted. Yet change is inevitable. To cope most successfully with change, it is best to remain flexible and open-minded, and to be philosophic and stay focused on bigger picture understandings. It is

most desirable to cultivate an enlightened and positive attitude toward the inevitable, because suffering is a function of resistance to what is, and resistance to change is counterproductive."

This somewhat abstruse line of thinking made me realize that when organisms are under great stress, they demonstrate their deepest expression of character and the most determined aspects of their ability to survive. Bristlecone pines, for instance, are the living things with the greatest individual longevity, capable of living to more than 5,000 years of age, yet they exhibit a severely gnarled aspect that is the consequence of inhospitable conditions of wind and cold and drought in the high altitude habitats where they are adapted to grow. Likewise, some of the greatest human geniuses have led lives that have been at times quite tortured, like Jack London and John Steinbeck, and Ernest Hemingway, and even Mark Twain!

Jack London might have countered this line of thinking with one of his most famous quotes, which puts even hardship in context: "I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days trying to prolong them. I shall use my time." London lived a life filled with adventures, and wrote great novels like *The Call of the Wild*, and *Martin Eden* -- and then he died tragically young at the age of forty, due to heavy drinking!

Several of us gals had studied psychology in college, so we were familiar with the intriguing principles of human psychology and personality enunciated by Sigmund Freud. This was coincidentally the same era in which Robert Frost wrote his immortal poem, *The Road Not Taken*. Sigmund Freud posited that there are three aspects of the psyche: the 'id', the 'ego', and the 'superego'. These constructs provide us with a fascinating way of thinking about the mysterious workings of our minds. The 'id' represents basic drives and instinctive impulses and subconscious motivations; it is driven by a combination of pleasure seeking and pain avoidance, and it is infantile in its emotional development. Freud used the term 'ego' to mean the province of conscious desires and defense mechanisms that function to make 'das Ich' (the I) feel safe. The 'ego' mediates between the primitive drives of the 'id' and the challenges inherent in the reality of situations that an individual faces. The 'superego' in Freud's theory represents those aspects of our selves that internalize the cultural rules of authority figures and mothers and fathers. Thus the 'superego' is our sense of conscience, of moral right and wrong, and of acting in ethical ways. It governs the impulses of the id and the ego, and strives to balance and control these other two powerful internal forces. Guilt is one of the most familiar sidekicks of the superego.

Another subtler force lies deep in the modern soul. As author John Fowles realized, there is also an aspect of ourselves that represents the psychic impulse which motivates us to try to be somebody, to be remembered, and to thwart our deep insecurity of being an insignificant nobody. Fowles named this quality the 'nemo'. The 'nemo' is made more powerful by the knowledge of inequalities in life, and by such haunting anxieties as feelings of psychological emptiness, futility, unimportance, alienation and the ephemeral nature of life. A sense of being nothing or nobody can contribute to low self-esteem, unreason, aggression, violence and acts that lead to infamy.

As a counterforce to the nemo, a *Yay! for You Movement* has been launched by inveterate positivist enthusiasts. Maybe it is coming to a neighborhood near you! (Hugs all around!) This movement stems from a wonderfully clever and highly entertaining short film by Kurt Kuenne titled **Validation**. In the film, a parking garage attendant whose job it is to validate people's parking tickets effusively greets a dolorous character as the film begins, and he is so upbeat, gregariously cheerful, friendly, and generously complimentary to patrons that soon a long line forms of people seeking personal encouragement and positive feedback and general validation. A wonderfully clever storyline ensues ... Check it out!

It is good to occasionally pause and ask, *What Really Matters?* A book that asks this question is subtitled *Searching for Wisdom in America*. This book provides readers with valuable and provocative understandings. Perhaps the materialism of our modern cultures has a tendency to magnify the 'nemo impulse' and make us feel shallow, as if we are insignificant cogs in an enormous machine, or lost faces in a crowd. Perhaps long work hours, television, the Internet, social media, rapid technological changes and other forces alienate us in critical ways. Even people who enjoy relative freedom and have plenty of money tend to be susceptible to feeling a deep down lack of fulfillment. People's values seem to be subject to being corroded by misplaced envy, reactive jealousy, or the anti-validation forces of exploitive insecurity-propagating capitalist anti-egalitarianism. And our important

sense of community is seemingly being insidiously eroded by excessive materialism, selfishness, stoked divide-to-conquer partisan rancor and uncompassionate and unscrupulously divisive ploys.

These aspects of the human condition make one of Pliny the Elder's observations especially poignant: "An object in possession seldom retains the same charm that it had in pursuit." As astute observers of human nature recognize, it is often better to want what you have than to be unbalanced by trying to get what you want. And heedless living can be one of the surest paths toward dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

Ironically, *What Really Matters* was written by Tony Schwartz, who had ghostwritten *The Art of the Deal* about Donald Trump, and the author came to regret that the success of that book put a shiny patina on the ruthless real estate mogul, a conniving master manipulator that the world would come to really rue.

Most of us gals declared ourselves happy to be inaugural members of this new *Yay! for You Movement*. The notably glum, argumentative and possibly chemically-imbalanced devotees to the opposing *Need To Be Right Movement* strive to undermine, deny and belittle those of us in the *Yay! Movement*. But those of us committed to the *Yay!* philosophy ignore the assault. We blithely hum to our selves, or silently recite Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*, appreciating the difference it has made in our lives. Or we contemplate the curious mantra, "There but for the grace of God go I", and indulge in other self-justificatory, self-congratulatory and self-protective strategies to feel good about our selves, possibly suffused with a surfeit of natural serotonins. Ha! It sure is a curious world!

George W. Bush once said, "I'm a glass half-full kind of a guy." He said this in conjunction with some optimistic spin about a surge in violent conflict in Baghdad and southern Iraq in late March 2008, characterizing it as being a "very positive sign". It was as though he was demonstrating an Alfred E. Neuman *Mad Magazine* attitude of "What, Me Worry?" Apparently he believed that increased violence in Iraq at the time was not being caused by the fraying strain of our escalated military occupation (the touted Surge), or its attendant repressions. Here was a guy so bizarrely comfortable with his own spin that he could work hard to figuratively empty the glass and then keep sucking the liquid out until it's negative half-full, just for the benefit of the proverbial few, and yet he can still proclaim that the glass is half-full, no matter what the unpatriotic naysayers and other detractors may say, those dastardly "nattering nabobs of negativism".

Perhaps the next Nobel Prize for Peace will go to someone who can develop a unified theory that will provide solace to the 'nemo' aspects of our souls, and give people more of a sense of satisfaction, personal security, humanism, connectedness and positivism, and heal rather than harm, and enable a healthier balance of feminine values to counterbalance the dominating masculine ones. Heck, if it's unified enough, perhaps a peace advocate will be able at the same time to integrate and explain and mitigate such odd things as Road Rage phenomenon and the mass shooting Gun Rampage phenomenon and Suicide Bomber motivations! *Cool*.

While we were underway on our catamaran, a large fish would occasionally be seen leaping entirely out of the salty sea. We wished we could access deeper ways of knowing why. We suspected it was an act of evasion, of desperation, of ephemeral escape. But perhaps the fish was just having a great day. Perhaps the jumps were acts of rebellion, or of ecstatic non-conformity. Perhaps these fish were the exuberant Jonathan Livingston Seagulls of the piscatorial realm, expressing an irrepressible fish spirit!

Early in life I discovered that forward motion is indispensable in mastering skills of riding a bicycle. The same is true of progressive values. Instead of stalling out by stubbornly resisting change, we gain better balance by going with the flow and maintaining momentum, and acting proactively, and using our intuitive common sense. This would likely be the best way to achieve favorable outcomes. As Carrie was fond of saying, "It's simply common sense; everyone has it, but very few use it. Make it work, and make it work to your advantage." Since I am a sensible believer in Golden Rule ethics, I thought: Yes, and make it work fairly. Fairness, after all, augurs best for both peaceful coexistence and collective well-being.

"Doubtless some philosophers have had all sorts of wisdom except common sense; and many a philosophic flight has been due to the elevating power of thin air."

--- Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*

Logical understanding does not always rule our actions, and emotionality often trumps reason. This is why fear-mongers, demagogues, religious fundamentalists and marketing promoters are so successful at manipulating the masses into going along with their sometimes-despicable agendas. Our species squabbles hot-buttonedly about the God-given rights of an embryo from the moment a sperm and egg meet. We debate about what forms of succor and support, if any, society should provide to children once they are born. Holy books proclaim, in ignominious patriarchal dominion, that women should be subservient to men. Powerful undercurrents of racism and gender bias smolder in the interstices of our brains and the undergirdings of our cultures. Religious leaders too often assert with harsh prejudice that gay men and lesbian women are 'abominations' to God.

Folderol! While we skirmish heatedly over such ideological and prejudicial idiocies, we selfishly and mindlessly look the other way as our leaders pile enormous debts upon all people in the future. We frequently act assiduously, whether or not inadvertently, like zombies watching disastrous developments with the detachment of God, in ways likely to leave our descendants a world out of balance and burdened by excessive debt, a world of depleted resources and diminished habitats, dammed and polluted rivers, degraded oceans, shortages of fresh water, decimated wildlife, diminished biological diversity, clear-cut forests, a destabilized climate, heightened conflicts, war-for-dominance disaster zones, millions of refugees, and corrupt and equality-forsaking governments. We even debate about whether or not billions of tons of greenhouse gases that are being spewed into the atmosphere every year are insidiously altering global weather patterns; or gosh, if they are, whether this really presents a problem. Oh, faith! Could it actually be good news and serendipity?

Just after our excursion, candidate Barack Obama said on March 18, 2008, in a bold address that was hailed almost immediately as a watershed moment: "America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope -- the audacity of hope -- for what we can and must achieve tomorrow." Although his primary message in these words was about racial prejudices, I believe that this idea should be applied to an even more important issue: the need to change our civilizations by supporting the most important initiative in human history, which is to improve human societies for everyone around the globe by educating and empowering girls and women and advancing important protective feminine principles. Much chagrin, poverty, inequity, violence and suffering, and many unwanted children, are caused by unfair discrimination against females. The cultural stratification of gender roles is pathetic in countries dominated by males all around the globe, and particularly in Islamic nations and macho Latin American and African nations.

I say to black females, white females, Latino females, Oriental females, all females:

***Women of the World, Unite!***

Barack Obama: "I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together, unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction -- toward a better future for our children and our grandchildren." Listen to the echo of these words as you read them again. (Years later, it seems terribly sad that once Barack Obama was elected president, most conservative politicians worked relentlessly to make him fail, at a very high and growing cost to the American people. Then, after more years passed, truly tragic developments are coming to pass because of the illegitimate power grab by ruthless profiteers, and a magazine article cover explained the situation simply. It featured a close-up photo of Donald Trump with an ugly pig's snout replacing his nose, "Not Collusion ... Not Incompetence ... Not Cruelty ... It's the Corruption, Stupid. -- Why His Self-Dealing is His Biggest Political Liability.")

These discursive thoughts occurred to me as the seventh night on the cool catamaran was coming to a conclusion (and later). We were anchored in a lovely horseshoe-shaped cove on the southwest side of Isla San Francisco, with a brightly-lighted ship spending the night just to the south of us. It was one of few large boats we had seen during our week-long aquatic journey. It turned out to be a passenger vessel on which the Board of Directors of the World Wildlife Fund was conducting its annual meeting at that moment. We had found this out because, despite having provisioned almost perfectly in La Paz and still having a fair amount of food left, and lots of sweet oranges for breakfast juice or cocktails, we somehow had nearly run out of vodka and rum.

Brazen Samantha and Captain Natalie took matters into their own hands by hailing a crew member of the wildlife organization on the beach and explaining our minor plight. An hour later this crew member very generously motored over in her skiff and fortuitously sold us a bottle of each of the things we lacked for a reasonable price, and I assure you we sang her praises that night. Yachting makes one thirsty, as evidenced by John Steinbeck's mention of large quantities of beer that their party managed to consume during their excursion. Oh, yes, some of us gals may have gotten a little bit intoxicated on occasion, for this was a vacation from hectic lives. Ah, Nepenthe!

Notably, the World Wildlife Fund and other scientific organizations release a Living Planet Report every other year, and they have been reporting on the health and well-being of life on Earth since beginning a study of more than 10,000 representative populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish. Their findings are increasingly ominous: there has been an average decline of about 60% in the past 50 years since 1970. This stunning finding makes philosophic speculations about the damaging nature of human activities poignant and palpable, and the report inauspiciously confirms that humankind is already in a dire situation of ecological overshoot! Let us be proactive, and honestly address environmental social, financial and population challenges.

### Day Eight

Grace pointed out during breakfast that there was some tidy symbolism in the name of our vessel, the *Gato de Cortez*. She had been reading *Islands in the Stream*, a novel by Ernest Hemingway, which was posthumously published in 1970. In it, the protagonist expressed his love for both cats and boats. The author writes about Thomas Hudson, the book's stoic main character, and his cat:

"Princessa was such a delicate and aristocratic cat, smoke grey, with golden eyes and beautiful manners, and such a great dignity that her periods of being in heat were like an introduction to, and explanation and finally exposition of, all the scandals of royal houses. Since he had seen Princessa in heat, not the first tragic time, but after she was grown and beautiful, and so suddenly changed from all her dignity and poise into wantonness, Thomas Hudson knew that he did not want to die without having made love to a princess as lovely as Princessa."

Ha! There again is that old-as-the-hills male compulsion to satisfy enthralling drives for engaging in titillating indulgences and sexual intercourse. "I wish we non-cats had something that was as harmless as catnip that would have as much effect, he (Thomas Hudson) thought. Why don't we have something like that we can get drunk on?" This line of thought brings to mind an observation made by Christopher Hitchens:

"Owners of dogs will have noticed that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they will think you are god. Whereas owners of cats are compelled to realize that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they draw the conclusion that they are gods."

Fortuitously, no catfights occurred during our sojourn on the Sea of Cortez, even though we surely had enough estrogen to fire a freighter's furnace, and our spirits were high and stresses were low, and conflicts were almost nonexistent. In the afternoon, as we returned toward La Paz, we pulled in to a cove that leads to a lovely narrow channel separating Isla Partida from Isla Espiritu Santo. Three of us took our skiff, powered by a reliable outboard engine, through the shallow channel to the east side of the islands. As we traversed the channel, small stingrays darted along the sandy bottom and pelicans and seagulls stood around passively watching us from spots along the shore.

We chuckled as we pattered along and Gabriela related the story of John Steinbeck's humorous descriptions in his *Log* about their skiff's wholly unreliable outboard motor. Members of their expedition were inconveniently forced to row their boat to shore on most occasions because of the temperamental shortcomings of their outboard motor. Steinbeck called their contraption, "for sake of secrecy, a Hansen Sea-Cow." Being a barely nautical lass, I needed to be told that this name was a thin disguise for old outboard motors of the Johnson Sea-Horse variety. Steinbeck enumerated the seven contemptible traits of that engine, and his humor and wit in those paragraphs alone is worth reading his *Log*. See Addendum One at the end of these *Tall Tales* for an entertaining excerpt of Steinbeck's invective about the outboard motor on their skiff.

When we got back to our anchored catamaran, a group of guys on a catamaran quite similar to ours passed by us at close range. All hands were on deck on both boats, and we exchanged some nice pleasantries for a few moments.

The atmosphere seemed suffused with a rarefied potentiality, and Samantha predictably flirted coyly, which was not exactly a well-advised move due to the simple fact that most of the gals aboard our boat were married, after all. Nonetheless, after a brief lull in the banter, the obviously testosterone-laden craft slowly moved off on its way. Natalie sang out with a note of cheery adieu, "Bon voyage!" Belatedly emboldened as they left, and possibly stimulated by the sight of so many attractive gals, or of Grace in a rather diaphanous blouse, we heard one handsome fellow call out, "We can't hear you! Take off your top!"

Ha! Boys will be boys! So much for dignity and *savoir faire*; this is once again proof positive that the influence of hormones on human behaviors is powerful. "Elementary, my dear Watson!" (#MeToo, of course.) Sigmund Freud and Desmond Morris and the provocatively observant Dr. Leonard Shlain would have had a field day with the genesis of these interesting interactions. Samantha simply began to remove her clothing in a provocative striptease as our vessels quivered and then disengaged with an incumbent spurt. One of the guys on the other boat suspiciously looked like a man destined one day to be called El Gaviero (the Lookout). The most memorable adventures tend to grow in grandeur, but not necessarily in accuracy of remembrance, every time they are described, sometimes even outgrowing the possible itself!

I still recall the sunset from the previous evening. Wispy clouds in the dusk skies to the west had lit up above the mountains of the Baja Peninsula with a brilliance reminiscent of a colorful kaleidoscope slowly changing hues. We had been anchored at the time for the night in a cove near Isla Partida, and a fine day was reaching its conclusion. The soft rich colors of the sunset evoked an introspective mood, and I was alone on the front of the catamaran, sitting cross-legged in a relaxed meditative posture. I have always wanted to be skillful at transcendental meditation, so I looked inside, and I looked inside, and I looked inside some more. I saw the usual jumble of thoughts and feelings, but no unifying order. It was like the jumble of volcanic, sedimentary and granitic rocks found in the Baja, inscrutably complex and unfathomable in the myriad particularities and processes of its eons-long origin, tectonic movement, uplift and emplacement.

"Be here now. Be someplace else later. Is that so complicated?"

--- Sayings of a Jewish Buddhist

As I reflected on the day, the sun slid further beneath the horizon as planet Earth continued its majestic revolution around its rotational axis. The ephemeral display of fiery colors in fleeting clouds slowly faded to dark. As in the past, Buddha-like enlightenment was not at hand for me. But ideas that skirted around its towering potentiality made it seem plausible that, in fact, it might be possible to achieve a greater modicum of objective clarity in life, along with a warming measure of heart-centered compassion. To head in the right direction, anyway, would be an exceedingly good plan! As John Steinbeck noted, "The essence lies somewhere. There must be some way of finding it."

Perhaps, as Will and Ariel Durant assert in their great book, *The Lessons of History*, "The only real revolution is in the enlightenment of the mind and the improvement of character, the only real emancipation is individual, and the only real revolutionists are philosophers and saints."

Most Americans are familiar with the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. In it, 12-year-old Dorothy from Kansas and her dog Toto are caught in a tornado and transported to the magical land of Oz, where Dorothy meets three characters who are seeking what they lack: a Cowardly Lion who seeks courage, a Scarecrow who seeks a brain, and a Tin Man who seeks a heart. They follow the yellow brick road through riotously imagined doors of perception in the Land of Oz to the Emerald City, where they find out that an intimidating Wizard of Oz is really just a power-tripping old man, a blustery fraud who hid behind a curtain of pomp and subterfuge. The Wizard, his fraud exposed by Toto, redeems himself by helping each of them discover that most of what they seek actually lies within.

Most people myopically seek answers from without. They seek meaning in *things*, rather than in qualities and affirmative relationships. Having, not being, governs our time. The majority of people carry around Sunday School caricatures of an ultra-Oz-like God in their hazy imaginations, and they believe with anthropocentric passion that this God has human qualities that are curiously inspired by hopes and fears. These imagined qualities include all-knowing omniscience, loving concern, eternally infinite attention to detail, maniacal jealousy, retributive

vindictiveness, a stentorian voice, cosmic intelligence, brilliant design, cosmic creativity and unlimited power. (Whatever!)

But PLEASE! We have better things to do than fight over hot button issues, and much better things to do than to discriminate over differences in religious beliefs and ideologies. Unprecedented global challenges confront us, and we simply MUST work together to deal successfully with them. We can begin to solve these problems only by rejecting leaders who divide us, and greedy interest groups that manipulate us and mercilessly exploit us. We need to restructure our societies to elevate the positive aspects of our humanity, and to discourage the darker sides of our natures. Let's cultivate our better angels!

"A great number of people think that they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices."

--- William James

I recollected my thoughts as I had drifted off to sleep on the first night aboard the catamaran. My curiosity and imagination had been stimulated by John Steinbeck's observations in *The Pearl*, when he wrote of the songs that the peoples of Baja once created and sung and heard in their minds. Curiously, songs also spring into my head upon occasion, generally in fragments seeking to be fully formed. It is like the elusive 'race memory' thing that young Ayla and her tribe's elders experienced in *The Clan of the Cave Bear*. The songs that came to me were at times subtle and indistinct. At other times they were as clear and dramatic as one of Beethoven's symphonies, some of which the great composer had imagined into existence even as he was becoming deaf. There were haunting passages in these songs, ones that I recognized from my dream states, and I understood the music to be the Song of Everywoman. The tune began with a soaring orchestral melody, then a lovely flute trilled happily, and a solo vocalist murmured a Song of the Family. The music would occasionally swell to a crescendo, while the background rhythm included a full range of bass notes that articulated the Song of Everyman, and different segments of the symphony rang out with sounds of children, and of communities, and of all human beings, and of the ecological harmony of all living things. It was a song for the ages, with a lovely catchy beat of natural balance. A cyclical alto sax riff came and went, emphasizing the song's inclusion of respect for our ancestors, and a tenor saxophone harmonically intertwined, honoring our descendants. Let it be!

As fate and the passage of time would have it, our sojourn on the Sea of Cortez was approaching its conclusion. We gals felt far from the "real world" of our normal lives, even though we had been afloat on the boat for only eight days. The insight that John Steinbeck expressed in his *Log* rang with a rich resonance in our inner minds:

"The world and the war had become remote to us; all the immediacies of our usual lives had slowed up. Far from welcoming a return, we rather resented going back to business and newspapers and telegrams. We had been drifting in some kind of dual world -- a parallel realistic world; and the preoccupations of the world we came from, which are considered realistic, were to us filled with mental mirage. Modern economics; war drives; party affiliations and lines; hatreds, political and social and racial, cannot survive in dignity the perspective of distance. We could understand, because we could feel, how the Indians of the Gulf, hearing about the great ant-doings of the north, might shake their heads sadly and say, 'But this is crazy. It would be nice to have new Ford cars and running water, but not at the cost of insanity.'"

And so we gals came to the end of our journey on the Sea of Cortez. Each of us headed back to the 'other reality' of our busy lives, and to our various homes in the beautiful foothills of the Colorado Rockies, a coastal community on Cape Cod, the green hills of Northern California, and the heartland aside the Mississippi River. Yet when we returned to our various routines as late winter to the north approached early spring, we still ruminated about the sights, sounds, tastes, camaraderie and philosophical speculations that we had shared on our sojourn afloat on the Sea of Cortez.

Every experience in retrospect becomes a memory that is rather removed from the reality of what has been. As John Steinbeck concludes in his *Log of the Sea of Cortez*, "The real picture of how it had been there and how we had been there was in our minds, bright with sun and wet with sea water and blue or burned, and the whole crusted over with exploring thought."



My hope is that readers will consider this story, and be curious enough to explore the more extensive thoughts found throughout the *Earth Manifesto*. It would be splendid if lots of readers found a greater awareness and inspiration in these ideas, and perhaps even a modicum of enlightenment. By such circuitous means, may we all join together to help collectively create a better world!

That's my Tall Tale. As an old Italian proverb says: "Si non e vero, e ben trovato." That roughly translates to this: "Even if it's not true, it still makes a good story." Yes, indeed!

Yours Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Hannibal, Missouri

March 2008, updated August 2008, with sporadic modifications or additions every year or two thereafter

### Postscript One

John Steinbeck debated many of his formative ideas with biologist-philosopher Ed Ricketts and a small cohort of friends at Ricketts' Pacific Biological Laboratory in Monterey, California during the early 1930s. One of these friends was the great mythologist Joseph Campbell. Their avid reading and inquisitive nature and intense curiosity played out in a larger context of their appreciation of bohemian attitudes toward life and meaning and identity. They strived to make obscure things more comprehensible, and they cultivated visionary ideas and embraced live-and-let-live philosophies.

This seems to me to be an admirable way to regard the world. I have a strong respect for the progressive, irreverent, freewheeling ideas that they all passionately discussed, as epitomized in Steinbeck's book *The Log of the Sea of Cortez*. My enjoyment of this story was a principal inspiration for me to record my own philosophical exploration of provocative ideas during this catamaran excursion on the Sea of Cortez with a group of good friends in March 2008.

We gals sought a luminous clarity of seeing that was commensurate with the starkly vivid clarity of the dry Baja skies. We strived for a rich, evocative, holistic and compassionate clarity of perception and ways of seeing. Predictably, being members of the two-legged paradox that is humankind -- and perhaps particularly for the subset of human beings that are female -- we found a bit of anxiety in the confirmation that what Steinbeck described as "the tragic miracle of consciousness" is always filled with uncertainties and fears of inadequacy. Awareness is, by its very nature, both burden and glory, pain and pleasure, unsatisfying and fulfilling, mortifying and sublime. And it is inevitably book-ended by the individual birth and death of every conscious entity.

Imagine embracing a faith that not only satisfies the exalted aspects of our spiritual selves but also the more grounded aspects of our souls. Albert Einstein once observed, "Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that could cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism. If people are good only because they fear punishment, and hope for reward, then we are a sorry lot indeed."

I personally find a wisdom tradition like Buddhism to be much more personally valuable and socially desirable than dogmatic and orthodox religions, which can be turgid with closed-mindedness, self-righteousness, doctrinal absolutes, harsh prejudices, discriminatory intolerance, and catechisms of certainty in what are really rather suspiciously dubious mythological conceptions of reality and history.

"Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Forget this and attaining enlightenment will be the least of your problems."

### Postscript Two

One purpose of this story is to entertain readers and gain attention that may serve to highlight the overriding reason for my setting forth the ideas in these writings -- which is to focus better understanding on the legacy that we will leave to our descendants in the future. No matter what we do, or which culture we exist in, or where we travel, or how rich or poor we are, we should agree to a social contract in which our societies are structured in ways designed to ensure that we will leave a fairer legacy to those who will live after us.

Several of us girls had encountered turbulence on our flights to La Paz, and this experience was somewhat frightening, so it gave us a cogent sense of our own individual mortality. It made us think about the legacy we will individually leave in the world, and about the collective impacts we are having. The survival of our species is of overriding importance to our race, so these impacts are of paramount significance.

In the über-context of geological time, every person is alive for only a relatively brief span of time between our birth and inevitable death. As a part of our legacy, we should find ways to mitigate the amount of harm we do, while we are alive, to the prospects of people in the future. We should redesign our economic, political and social institutions so that they are oriented toward greater harmony with the future good. We should prioritize better, and intelligently address the problems we face with courageous dedication. We should empathetically, compassionately, honestly and practically cope with the big problems we collectively face, and strive to avoid making them worse, and stop foisting them onto people in the future. We cannot continue to have an <Après moi le déluge> attitude; and it is not acceptable to act as if it's okay to haughtily say, <Let them eat cake>.

Our top priorities should be focused on the best interests of young people, since they represent the future of our species. Unfortunately, we do not give great consideration to their best interests, primarily because they cannot vote. And those who will be born in future generations are given extremely short shrift by our short-term-oriented and exploitive decision-making. Our economic, legal and political systems are warped by the shortsighted vested interest groups that succeed in designing these systems to their own maximum narrow advantage. Selfishness and excessive greed and aggression are effectively glorified in our economic system, and we give privileges and power to those who have no compunction about harming others or damaging the environmental commons, or acting in ways detrimental to aggregate and future well-being.

Smile broadly to yourself. Rejoice philosophically, like the characters in *Zorba the Greek*. Embrace life, even in its imperfections and its suffering, its potential hollowness, and its insignificance in the context of eternity. Smile a salute to beauty and pleasure, and to the rapport of positive affirmation and the existential joys of being. Smile in appreciation of whatever good fortune you have in your life. Smile as you remember that life is short and the warmth of springtime can swell the breast with pleasure and hope. Smile, especially, in a good recognition of the extraordinary place we have in the cosmos. Be an alert and aware witness to the physical evolution of our home planet and the amazing nature of Nature. And never forget that the impacts we are having on those in the future are our most important legacy. This perspective makes it clear that we should strive to leave a better world, and not one likely to be highly detrimental to our descendants.

We must begin to formulate policies that are most likely to ensure the well-being of people in the future, particularly in light of the fact that our current policies are so contrary to future best interests. In case you have any doubts about this assertion, consider the following summary of nine ways that our actions today are hurting the hopes of people in future generations: (1) We are wastefully using up non-renewable resources like fossil fuels and fresh water aquifers at nearly the fastest possible rate; (2) We are over-harvesting renewable resources like forests and fisheries in an unsustainable manner; (3) We are pawning the assets critical to future needs by borrowing huge sums of money and indulging in the shortsighted expediency of deficit spending, year after year; (4) We are degrading fresh water resources almost everywhere, damming free-flowing streams and polluting surface and underground water sources; (5) We are destroying wetlands and dumping wastes and toxins irresponsibly into the environment; (6) We are destabilizing the global climate and damaging wildlife habitats and ecosystems worldwide; (7) We are failing to commit to initiatives that would ensure fairness, social justice, equal opportunities and a sound, sustainable economy; (8) We are allowing people who oppose sensible family planning programs to have excessive influence on national and international family planning, and (9) We are disdainful of diplomacy and international law with our aggressive military interventions and economic imperialism.

One of the principal advantages of our having evolved big brains is that they have given us the ability to communicate and learn, and develop knowledge, and gain foresight, and to pass these insights on to others in the future. Our big brains theoretically give us a good ability to act in accordance with the best of these understandings, so let's honorably strive to accomplish this goal!

----- The End -----

P.P.S. Rare opportunity: Be the first person in history to discover the writings in the *Earth Manifesto* and to provide feedback on the Soliloquies found herein. Think about the ideas conveyed in these *Tall Tales*, and compose your clearest and most thoughtful impressions of the ideas expressed. Send them to me at this email address: [SaveTruffulaTrees@hotmail.com](mailto:SaveTruffulaTrees@hotmail.com).

Someday these writings may reside among the most important ideas ever elaborated, and your constructive feedback or editorial suggestions may be included!

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#### An Ode to Tall Tales:

The *Modern Log* of a sailboat excursion on the Sea of Cortez rang poetic  
 Praising wilderness conditions and rich experiences and adventurous purposes,  
 Advocating clarity of thinking with a focus on sustainable modes of living  
 And a cessation of the presumption that Earth's cornucopia has infinite surpluses.

It is an entertaining tale spun by a once comely young lass  
 With startling ways of seeing issues and perspectives anew.  
 Times they are a-changin', and progressive ideas seek cogent expression  
 Yet we all too often have chosen leaders that act as if they haven't a clue.

Dazed by the accelerating pace and uncertain direction of change on planet Earth  
 And hypnotized by the converging challenges of our communities and societies  
 We ignore essential ecological principles that are indispensable to our well-being  
 And allow common good goals to be subverted by selfish greed-driven economic pieties.

It is not necessary to go sailing on the far-away Sea of Cortez  
 And to share enthusiastic feminine bonhomie under clear night skies  
 To gain clarity concerning healthy communications and interrelationships  
 And to feel deeper philosophical, moral and spiritual truths, as time flies.

#### Addendum One - An Excerpt from John Steinbeck's *Log from the Sea of Cortez*

(There were a total of 6 people aboard the *Western Flyer*, a 75-foot-long purse seiner, during the expedition made by John Steinbeck and Doc Ricketts to the Sea of Cortez in 1940. They also had a skiff with an outboard motor on it, which is the subject of this excerpt from Steinbeck's *Log from the Sea of Cortez*.)

We come now to a piece of equipment which still brings anger to our hearts, and we hope, some venom to our pen. Perhaps in self-defense against suit, we should say, "The outboard motor mentioned in this book is purely fictitious and any resemblance to outboard motors living or dead is coincidental." We shall call this contraption, of the sake of secrecy, a Hansen Sea-Cow -- a dazzling little piece of machinery, all aluminum paint and touched here and there with spots of red. The Sea-Cow was built to sell, to dazzle the eyes, to splutter its way into the unwary heart. We took it along for the skiff. It was intended that it should push us ashore and back, should drive our boat into estuaries and along the borders of little coves. But we had not reckoned with one thing. Recently, industrial civilization has reached its peak of reality and has lunged forward into something that approaches mysticism. In the Sea-Cow factory where steel fingers tighten screws, bend and mold, measure and divide, some curious mathematick has occurred. And that secret so long sought has accidentally been found. Life has been created. The machine is at last stirred. A soul and a malignant mind have been born. Our Hansen Sea-Cow was not only a living thing but a mean, irritable, contemptible, vengeful, mischievous, hateful living thing. In the six weeks of our association we observed it, at first mechanically and then, as its living reactions became more and more apparent, psychologically. And we determined one thing to our satisfaction. When and if these ghoulish little motors learn to reproduce themselves the human species is doomed. For their hatred of us is so great that they will wait and plan and organize and one night, in a roar of little exhausts, they will wipe us out. We do not think that Mr. Hansen, the inventor of the Sea-Cow, father of the outboard motor, knew what he was doing. We think the monster he created was as accidental and arbitrary as the beginning of any other life. Only

one thing differentiates the Sea-Cow from the life that we know. Whereas the forms that are familiar to us are the results of billions of years of mutation and complication, life and intelligence emerged simultaneously in the Sea-Cow. It is more than a species. It is a whole new redefinition of life. We observed the following traits in it and we were able to check them again and again:

1. Incredibly lazy, the Sea-Cow loved to ride on the back of a boat, trailing its propeller daintily in the water while we rowed.
2. It required the same amount of gasoline whether it ran or not, apparently being able to absorb this fluid through its body walls without recourse to explosion. It had always to be filled at the beginning of every trip.
3. It had apparently some clairvoyant powers, and was able to read our minds, particularly when they were inflamed with emotion. Thus, on every occasion when we were driven to the point of destroying it, it started and ran with a great noise and excitement. This served the double purpose of saving its life and of resurrecting in our minds a false confidence in it.
4. It had many cleavage points, and when attacked with a screwdriver, fell apart in simulated death, a trait it had in common with opossums, armadillos, and several members of the sloth family, which also fall apart in simulated death when attacked with a screwdriver.
5. It hated Tex, sensing perhaps that his knowledge of mechanics was capable of diagnosing its shortcomings.
6. It completely refused to run: (a) when the waves were high, (b) when the wind blew, (c) at night, early morning, and evening, (d) in rain, dew, or fog (e) when the distance to be covered was more than two hundred yards. But on warm, sunny days when the weather was calm and the white beach close by -- in a word, on days when it would have been a pleasure to row -- the Sea-Cow started at a touch and would not stop.
7. It loved no one, trusted no one. It had no friends.

Perhaps towards the end, our observations were a little warped by emotion. Time and again as it sat on the stern with its pretty little propeller trailing idly in the water, it was very close to death. And in the end, even we were infected with its malignancy and its dishonesty. We should have destroyed it, but we did not. Arriving home, we gave it a new coat of aluminum paint, spotted it at points with new red enamel, and sold it. And we might have rid the world of this mechanical cancer!

#### Addendum Two: DATELINE: Earth Day, April 22, 2018

John Steinbeck wrote of Salinas Valley in a letter to George Albee in 1933: "I think I would like to write the story of this whole valley, of all the little towns and all the farms and the ranches in the wilder hills. I can see how I would like to do it so that it would be the valley of the world." Many years later, in 1952, sure enough, Steinbeck published his great novel *East of Eden*, in which he told an almost biblical Adam-and-Cain story of characters in both the poor lands of the western foothills and the amazingly rich agricultural lands of the broad valley floor.

The great author begins *East of Eden* thusly: "The Salinas Valley is in Northern California. It is a long narrow swale between two ranges of mountains, and the Salinas River winds and twists up the center until it falls at last into Monterey Bay." ... "I remember that the Gabilan Mountains to the east of the valley were light gay mountains full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation, so that you wanted to climb into their warm foothills almost as you want to climb into the lap of a beloved mother. They were beckoning mountains with a brown grass love. The Santa Lucias stood up against the sky to the west and kept the valley from the open sea, and they were dark and brooding -- unfriendly and dangerous. I always found in myself a dread of west and a love of east. Where I ever got such an idea I cannot say, unless it could be that the morning came over the peaks of the Gabilans and the night drifted back from the ridges of the Santa Lucias. It may be that the birth and death of the day had some part in my feeling about the two ranges of mountains."

I, Tiffany B. Twain, with mountain ranges arrayed majestically in my imagination, aspire to write the story of this whole planet, and of some of the more clear-eyed and holistic worldviews regarding the miraculously beautiful and providential natural world in which we find ourselves living. (And unconscionably damaging.) I have explored the Salinas Valley from its headwaters above Santa Margarita Lake to the sea on Monterey Bay, and from the High

Peaks of the extraordinary volcanic Pinnacles to the east, across to the Coast Range toward Big Sur in the west. I have followed the old highway route along the Salinas River from San Ardo to San Lucas, to King City, to Soledad on the east side of the valley, and up the Arroyo Seco watershed into the Ventana Wilderness. I have driven up River Road on the west side of the valley past the wineries of the Santa Lucia Highlands vineyard appellation, where many of the vines grow on broad alluvial fans that spill down from the Coast Range mountains to the flat valley floor. And I have paddled a sea kayak up Elkhorn Slough from Moss Landing, where the Salinas River meets the Pacific Ocean, "a magical place full of wildlife and beauty", where wildlife flourishes, even including eminently cute thriving sea otters.

I also spent several years traveling abroad, on the real cheap, while I was in my twenties, and I imagined myself emulating the great Athenian philosopher Plato, who traveled abroad for twelve years at a time propitious for him, being a member of the nobility, at a dangerous time of political upheaval at home. On his travels he was "imbibing wisdom from every source, sitting at every shrine, tasting every creed," says the great historian Will Durant in *The Story of Philosophy*.

Tom Haines wrote interestingly in his long article *Steinbeck's Eden*, "there is something better to find here and in all of Steinbeck Country: a sense of what shaped the man and helped him create characters and stories that have sold millions of copies and resonated with readers from Tokyo to Toulouse."

Steinbeck wrote many things while living in central Salinas, less than 20 miles east of Monterey Bay. At the time, "his fiction caused the most intimate debate. Powerful growers felt stung by *The Grapes of Wrath*, and copies of the book were burned in front of the town library. Other locals were no happier when they turned up none-too-discreetly in *East of Eden*." In 1940, *The Grapes of Wrath* sparked much political debate when it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize Fiction Award. East Coast critics dogged much of his writing, but careful readers plumbed the layers he wove into works big and small."

Today, in marvelous contrast, the region celebrates John Steinbeck, with a fine museum located in the heart of historic Old town Salinas. "The National Steinbeck Center is dedicated to Steinbeck's creative legacy: to participate, to inspire, to educate, and to understand one another." This heartening change of heart is all because, "while locals were worrying about personal reputations and economic fallout, Steinbeck's books rose up, left the valley, and traveled around the world. There, they connected with readers who saw in them basic human struggles wrapped in good old storytelling."

"... after the Pulitzer and the Nobel and the quiet funeral and the postage stamp parade, the hometown, seeing more in the books, and money in celebrating them, decided to welcome home its wandering son."

"The thing I like about Steinbeck," one insightful observer said, "is at least he had the courage to write about the things nobody wanted to talk about."

Describing the great philosophic writer, a professor and director of the Center for Steinbeck Studies named Susan Shillinglaw at San Jose State University wrote: "Clarity of surface was something he was striving for." ... "He said he tried to see things with a child's vision. He saw what a child sees, but that doesn't mean there's not more in it."

"At times, while passing Steinbeck Travel, or the renamed John Steinbeck Library, it is hard to imagine what would intrigue the child, were he a young writer today. He could write about the refrigerated lettuce -- that failed "East of Eden" experiment -- which helped the farming boom. He could write about the Silicon stock option dreams, busted and not, in the valley one-hour north." Or perhaps he or she might adopt a more ecological and socially just perspective in life, and cultivate the broadest possible understandings.

Today, the National Steinbeck Center anchors a revival of the old town area of Salinas. "A visitor can watch a video of Steinbeck's life, then take a detailed walk through a tribute to Steinbeck's works. Kids pile on a model "Red Pony," while adults pick up an old phone and listen to the grower-picker debate that shaped *In Dubious Battle*. There are the Life magazine photos -- deemed too vivid to publish before *The Grapes of Wrath*, too relevant not to publish afterward -- comparing the real and imagined."

The National Steinbeck Center has galleries and a bookshop and wonderful exhibits detailing the great writer's life. My favorite part is at the end, where sits the original Rocinante, "the green, capped pickup that served as Steinbeck's rolling home during *Travels with Charley*, his late-in-life road trip to get in touch with America with his smart poodle Charley. Interestingly, Rocinante was Don Quixote's horse in the novel by Miguel de Cervantes. "In many ways, Rocinante is not only Don Quixote's horse, but also his double: like Don Quixote, he is awkward, past his prime, and engaged in a task beyond his capacities."

In *Steinbeck's Eden*, Tom Haines points out that John Steinbeck began the great novel that was to be called *East of Eden* with the valley and the mountains because he grew up there and spent years poking around among the hillsides and canyons, working jobs in the fields, measuring the relationship between humans and nature. Later, he wrote stories about striking apple pickers, about Lennie killing the puppy and the wife, and George killing Lennie, about Jody's red pony, alive and dead, and about farmers on the run. *Of Mice and Men* was an experiment with the form of the novel, and has been made into first-rate films in 1939 and again in 1992, and it is still being performed on stage, somewhere in the world, nearly every day.

"The stories needed a setting, a context. And that was the land." -- "Over nearly four decades, Steinbeck produced more than 30 works: novels, short stories, collections of reportage, books of nonfiction, personal journals, plays, screenplays. All of it, in ways obvious and not, started here, in the mountains and the valley below."

"So it makes sense for a modern traveler tracing a real life and a fictional universe to begin by following John Steinbeck, a century after his birth, to the far end of the long Salinas Valley, to a meadow tucked behind a pass in the bad mountains. It was here in this dry, rocky country, in the early 1930s, before one book earned the Pulitzer and all of them the Nobel, before Henry Fonda and James Dean put his characters on the screen, that Steinbeck set his second novel, *To a God Unknown*. When the novel's main character, Joseph Wayne, wandered over the pass to his 160-acre homestead in the mid-1800s, he found spiritual treachery and unspoiled tracts."

As it saith in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "... there is no new thing under the sun."

During his last visit to the Salinas Valley, in 1960, as John Steinbeck wandered America with Charley, his black standard poodle, he turned again to the land. He drove the road that climbs past the cattle grazing the soft hillsides, up along the dry ridges and into the pines of Fremont Peak. There, he mounted the "last spiky rocks to the top", and surveyed the valley. "When he wrote about this moment in *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck did not mention the hot Dust Bowl days or the simmering sagas in the town below. He did not mention the criticism or the praise. Instead, he gently told his dog Charley about his mother handling a gun, about his father branding a tree, in what was once, before he wrote about it, before it caught up with the outside world, its own place."

Then, he wrote in *Travels with Charley*, he took a last look: "I printed it once more on my eyes, south, west, and north, and then we hurried away from the permanent and changeless past where my mother is always shooting a wildcat and my father is always burning his name with his love."

#### A Congratulatory Salute to Rachel Maddow

Rachel Maddow deserves congratulations for having been awarded the meaningful John Steinbeck Award, which was given to her in a ceremony at San Jose State University in February 2012. This award by the prestigious Steinbeck Center honored her contributions for helping advance the values and themes found in John Steinbeck's writings. These include his great empathy and understanding, his belief in the dignity of people who by circumstance are pushed to the fringes, his commitment to democratic values, his concern for common folks, his critiques of the disparities between the fortunes and well-being of the rich and the poor, and his concern for the environment. This award is also known as the "In the Souls of the People Award", a rubric that conveys the touchingly vital importance of this honorable recognition.

In connection with this Steinbeck Center honor, John Steinbeck's son, Thomas Steinbeck, expressed his own appreciation of Rachel Maddow's work in a letter to national newspapers. The feelings he expressed are high praise, and worthy of considering closely. Here is what Thom wrote:

"John Steinbeck, my father, would have been absolutely fascinated and intrigued by Rachel Maddow and her role as a first-class observer and commentator of the political agendas that now embroil our country in such a

morass of ill will, cultural dislocation and partisan infighting. He once portrayed his friend and mentor, CBS newsman Walter Cronkite, as a man who could inevitably winnow the kernels of empirical truth from the chaff of private political ambition, misdirection and cultural manipulation, and do so with such good humor and honest concern for his fellow Americans that he never made enemies, even among those of different political persuasions. It was because of these qualities that he became the most trusted man in the country."

"It is my honest opinion that Rachel Maddow possesses many of these same critical characteristics, and they stand, for all intents and purposes, on a pedestal of individual and professional integrity, which makes all the difference when navigating the turbulent tides of modern political conflict and financial instability and social insecurity."

"With full knowledge of my father's unique instincts, tastes and preferences in such matters, I believe John Steinbeck would, if he were still among us, personally present Rachel Maddow with any award he could lay his hands on just for the opportunity to meet and talk with her. My father once declared that he would crew any ship Walter Cronkite chose to command. I heartily echo that sentiment with regard to Rachel Maddow, and I sincerely bless all who sail with her."

Bravo! Previous recipients of the Steinbeck Award include Bruce Springsteen, Arthur Miller, Jackson Browne, Sean Penn, Studs Terkel, Garrison Keillor, Michael Moore and Joan Baez. This is great company! Rachel's national exposure on MSNBC with *The Rachel Maddow Show* likely contributes a greater positive impact than many of these recipients. Yay for that!

Rachel was presented this award in 2012, along with John Mellencamp, who said of Steinbeck, "His remarkable ability to give voice to the common man and to people on society's margins continues to inspire me. I'm honored to be given an award in his name."

#### Germinating and Seeking Inclusion in This Manifesto

The Climate Crisis -- It's an undeniable fact: **we are in a climate crisis** of "global weirding." Last year, millions of people experienced extreme weather as a direct result of climate change. Every corner of our country was impacted -- California wildfires burned nearly 1 million acres in the summer of 2021 alone, and a February 2021 blackout in Texas was caused by arctic extreme cold, and the Pacific Northwest was affected by unprecedented heat waves, and extreme storms and flooding caused extensive damages in the Midwest, leading to power outages for hundreds of thousands.

Right here and now, billions of people around the world are confronting the daily impacts of the climate crisis. Climate change is exacerbating already-dire humanitarian emergencies around the world that are caused by similar episodes of extreme heat and drought, storms, floods, mudslides and wildfires.

And the people and communities at greatest risk from climate change are those least responsible for causing it. The appropriate persons to help pay for climate change prevention and adaptation are those spewing the most greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and investors who are profiting by the negligence of entrenched interests being allowed to externalize costs associated with these emissions.

#### Where We Stand

Humankind is embarked on a rash and uncontrolled experiment in profligate resource use, stimulated consumerism, rash speculation in assets and commodities, wide-ranging industrialization, sprawling globalization, dramatic urbanization, status-seeking behaviors, doctrinaire financial deregulation, inequitable social policies, uncompromising political partisanship, large-scale monoculture agriculture, rapid population growth and hyper aggressive militarism. As a result of the mindlessly rash character of these policies, we are generating a myriad of pollutants, toxins and wastes, and we are spewing tens of billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year. These activities are having the effect of harming life on Earth and altering the gaseous composition of the atmosphere and affecting storm and precipitation patterns worldwide. The impact of all these reckless activities is to extensively modify habitats and ecosystems. It is consequently becoming increasingly imperative that we find better ways to achieve a revolutionary transformation in our collective behaviors, and that we

proactively choose to alter our priorities to create outcomes that are more consistent with a positive legacy for posterity.