



An Autobiographical Obituary

I have written a fine, passionate, well-articulated autobiographical obituary. It all but definitively reveals the true identity of the person whose nom de plume is Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, and since I prize my anonymity and seriously appreciate living a life outside the spotlight and devoid of controversy, that obituary will remain confidential.

Besides, mystery is a powerful force, and may well prove to be a pivotal aspect of the discovery and promotion of the Earth Manifesto. That might be very good for our collective prospects in the world.

Underlying my rich experiences in life, a passionate philosophizing spirit has pervaded my being and urged me to express myself in an on-going outpouring of written observations that incorporate extensive reading and conversations and an evolving sense that our crazy lives require a really revolutionary transformation toward a more ecologically sane future that would have an increased probability of being sustainable. Somewhere along the way, I recognized the high improbability of succeeding in changing the world by publishing my ideas without some clever angle, so I began a sustained effort to gather together my germinating thoughts and ideas into this curious evolving Earth Manifesto, which I first put online, and then began assembling for publication.

Early on, I had decided I would use Mark Twain's fame and sense of humor and insightful perspectives as an inspiration to help illuminate the world, so I incorporated the thoughts and perspectives and ideas of many famous writers, artists, philosophers, thinkers, and spiritual leaders. I have always felt a keen sense that a profound and far-reaching malaise affects humanity, and that it is associated with the domination of societies worldwide by wealthy people who strive to get more and more for themselves at the expense of all others. I have also been sensitive to other social injustices that are associated with hyper-competitive patriarchal societies and the chauvinism of males, and I regard the ecological and social mess they are making as severe. So I chose to adopt a feminine persona and nom de plume, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, a hypothetical great-granddaughter of Mark Twain.

I love my good fortune in life, and treasuring my anonymity, I have kept my writing activities largely secret from all I know.

In the early morning hours of my 66th birthday in November 2015, I experienced an ephemeral episode that really made me viscerally aware of my encroaching mortality. I awoke from a deep sleep while camped out in a tent in the campground just outside the east entrance to Pinnacles National Park and it was a cold and drizzly November night. I got up to go outside to attend to some business and immediately felt quite faint due to a sudden deficiency in oxygen-carrying blood in my brain, and I suffered what turned out to be an orthostatic hypotensive vasovagal syncope. Huh? Yes, soon after getting up from a prone position, I blacked out while standing erect, and I hit the rain-soaked campground dirt forehead first, leaving me with some small abrasions and a sore neck for the next few days. This experience reinforced my conviction that one must live for the moment, while also intrepidly keeping in sight one's most noble goals and working to bring them to fruition.

The event was a cogent reminder that I am definitely not immortal, and that one never knows when the end may come, so that it is a commendably good idea to be grateful for being alive and healthy, and to enjoy the moment. Carpe Diem! This Latin aphorism, meaning "Seize the Day", was coined by the Roman poet Horace and reflects his Epicurean background. The evocative meaning of "carpe diem", as Horace used it, is not to ignore the future, but rather not to trust that everything is going to fall into place for you, and to thus take affirmative action for the future today.

In my younger days, I emulated Ishmael in the great novel *Moby Dick*, who set off on a sea voyage whenever it was a damp and drizzly November in his soul. I literally took to heart a wanderer's inner urging to set off on an adventure while I was in my twenties and still fit of body and mind and eager of propensity. *Carpe Viam*, I thought, as I "seized the road". With a philosophical flourish, Cato the Younger, a stubborn Stoic who was angered and flummoxed by the success of Caesar, threw himself upon his sword, and Ishmael more rationally quietly took to the sea, but I was young and adventurous and sought the spice of life experienced in foreign travel and variety and freedom and exploring.

Numerologists say that the number 6 is a symbol of completeness, so my demise on my 66th birthday would have been perfect, in that one regard. The number 6 is said to symbolize high ideals, and mine have only become higher with this acute reminder of my mortality. It is highly likely that I am more than 2/3 of the way to my death, so time is a-wasting for enjoying and appreciating life, and for succeeding at transforming the world with my writings. All twelve of my 212-page books of the *Earth Manifesto* are currently available from Lulu Publishing, and they evolve somewhat continuously.

REFLECTIONS

Famous mythologist Joseph Campbell suggested to John Steinbeck that he make revisions to his 1930s elemental story, *To a God Unknown*, so that it would contain evocative sensual and visual qualities. Imagine these reflections commencing with a few paragraphs that are richly suggestive, and that some catchy rock and roll music accompanies the unfolding of these thoughts.

Picture some towering granitic peaks that vault into a deep blue sky above a picturesque alpine lake near a spot where a backpack tent is perched on a calm morning in the early summer. Framing this scene are a number of puffy white cumulus clouds that are building into thunderclouds that will drop precipitation by mid-afternoon. Lightning will flash and thunder will rumble and rumble across the alpine landscape. At lower elevations to the west, a wide swath of evergreen forest covers lower mountains that rise from dry foothills, and beyond that, the Central Valley of California bakes in the summer heat. Coastal ranges further west separate these ecosystems from the beautiful shores of the Pacific Ocean.

The genesis of the *Earth Manifesto* has its roots in a genial and voluble storyteller within me that generates a running commentary on life and the world and the societies in which we live. My inner narrator is too reflective and gently compulsive to be able to do Transcendental Meditation, but this inner self certainly loves to ponder the nature of Nature, of relationships and interrelationships, of beauty, of both noble aspirations and human follies, and the sublime and the ridiculous.

This voice within is sensitively tuned to ideas and understandings and feelings that are consistent with the greater good, and intensely aware of ideas that are contrary to it. A complex network of competing interests within our selves, and within our societies, strives to find identity, meaning and purpose through a wide variety of activities and behaviors. Because of the nature of our big brains and self-reflective impulses and our abilities to make inferences and deductions, we human beings are uniquely capable of making choices that actually strongly affect our destinies, both individually and collectively. These impacts can be either propitious or adverse to our well-being.

My mind absorbs inputs from daily life and digests them, and makes observations about them. This steady stream of inputs comes from personal relationships, conversations, books and various sources of the news, and from spontaneous perceptions that arise within my subconscious. I strive to convey my convictions with an Apollonian detachment, warmed by a Dionysian passion, and with a sense of proportion that is as appropriate as possible. Humor and irony, being the soul of perspective, inform my passionately felt but bemused understandings.

Note to self: Make your obituary funny, like Carla Zilbersmith did in her obituary!

A triumvirate of concerns predominates in this associative complex of considerations: societal fairness, peaceful coexistence, and improved prospects for the sustainability of our activities in aggregate. The über-context of my feelings and judgments always seems to conclude that our most important national priorities, as currently

constituted in our increasingly dysfunctional political system, are dramatically different than what would be best for the common good. The reason for this, in general, is political.

My convictions are grounded in astute observations and intuitive understandings and perspectives that are as open-minded as possible. Many people are passionate but blinded by economic dogmas, religious doctrines, political spin or cherry-picked information, so they become inflexible in socially undesirable ways. Foremost among these orthodox people are extreme social conservatives, religious fundamentalists, apologists for the status quo, and corporate lobbyists. These types of people seem to have a distinctly different worldview than mine.

Earth Manifesto writings have a strong emphasis on sensible and responsible protections of our home planet's habitats and ecosystems. Such perspectives are a natural evolution from the overriding issues of Mark Twain's day when *Gilded Age* inequalities, robber baron injustices, monopolies, corporate conglomerate abuses of power, and American imperialism were the primary socioeconomic and econopolitical concerns. As an heir to Mark Twain's acuity of observation and incisive wit, I feel strongly that in a reincarnation of his perceptivity today he would be critically cognizant of new overarching ecological exigencies in human affairs, and he would be acutely aware of the host of problems associated with them. The entire body of Earth Manifesto understandings is incorporated into this biography by reference to highlight these interconnections.

The influential ideas of the humorous visionary Mark Twain have had a powerful cultural effect on our nation and the world. The Earth Manifesto takes advantage of Mark Twain's ideas and evolving understandings and scientific insights to emphasize progressive perspectives in today's world. It also advances a more feminine worldview to try to transform our world by making it more receptive to principles of gender fairness, collaborative undertakings, and peaceable coexistence. "Intriguing!"

A new feminist revolution would arguably be one of the best ways for us to commit our societies to developing positive and propitious compromises between competing interests, and to prevent impulses toward war over testosterone-fueled aggression, ruthless competition for limited resources, and differing religious faiths.

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck is perplexed with the moral quandary of his helping a slave escape as they journey down the Mississippi River on a raft. His conscience tells him he should turn Jim over to the authorities, but another part of him says that Jim is one of the best friends he has ever had, and he even thinks that maybe slavery ain't a fair institution.

Tom Sawyer would have said, "I reckon we should devise a real razzmatazz plan, and heck, if it doesn't work out, we can always absquatulate and light out for the territories."

Huck Finn, desperate to get out of a tight spot, would have said, "Tom, can't we just go with a simple plan that would have the best chance of succeeding? The territories are getting pretty crowded these days, and the ridiculous complexification of matters by politicians and lawyers is calamitating the country."

Tom, of course, would have replied, "All the real adventurers go with fancy plans, so it's hardly worth doing if it's just going to be simple and fair and effective!"

Ken Burns produced a good documentary titled *Mark Twain*. One of the best things about it was its timing. It appeared just before September 11, 2001, precisely when we most needed wisdom about who we are, and what we stand for, and nobody gave us "a better going over" than Mark Twain. He railed against imperialism, racism and conformity, and he also celebrated the better angels of our nature: our orneriness, our independence, our "Huckness," if you will.

Mark Twain had a reputation as an unconventional thinker who irreverently seemed to enjoy exposing human hypocrisies. He loved to play billiards and the card game "Hearts", and seems to have been much better than most people at remaining a fun-loving boy at heart into his old age. Yay! for cultivating a healthy skepticism, and for remaining young at heart!

I remember a cogent sensation of having seen myself in a reflection of a large window of a lighted room where friends of mine were socializing in the background. What, I thought, do I really know about any of these people? Who, for that matter, am I?

A wide variety of tragically mortifying indignities will almost inevitably be involved in the process of aging and dying for each and every one of us. This will be true unless we die suddenly at a young age, which would be an eventuality that isn't exactly all that appealing!

I hope to live a long and healthy life -- so far so good! -- and then to die in dignity. My Advance Health Care Directive has been completed, in case any "death panels" want to know the details. Ha!

The ultimate final dignity is dignity in dying. How can we move our society toward making a national commitment to initiatives that allow people greater dignity in life, as well as in death? Let us consult organizations like Compassion and Choices, and heed the life story and philosophy of San Francisco socialite Merla Zellerbach in her final days.

"The personal life deeply lived always expands into truths beyond itself."

--- Anais Nin

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
 To the last syllable of recorded time
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
 Signifying nothing."

--- *Macbeth, Act 5, Shakespeare*

Thoughts and opinions germinate mysteriously in my mind, and then bubble forth, sometimes half-baked and sometimes fully formed like the Greek goddess Athena who was born by springing forth fully developed from Zeus' forehead. Athena, curiously, was the goddess of wisdom and strategy, of war and just causes, and was regarded as the helper of heroes. Perhaps good ideas, well conceived, are the most valuable of things to spring forth in our consciousness.

I am fully convinced that we should seek collective salvation in the here and now, instead of accepting the tragedies of the sea of troubles in which we find ourselves and hoping for a good standing in some fictitious future life. It would be much better for us to commit ourselves to improving our societies today by changing the backward-looking policies that contribute so woefully to social ills, economic unfairness, and ecologically dastardly impacts on the prospects of people in future generations to be able to enjoy their own reasonable prospects for health, well-being and prosperity.

I believe passionately that leaders of established religions should put much more effort into creating societies that are more socially just in the here and now, rather than making their usual efforts to promote hopes for an afterlife that involve rationalizations for social policies today that are strict and discriminatory and damning and conflict engendering.

I admire people who courageously advocate sweeping social reform, and who reject politically reactionary stances

and fanatical religious zealotry. I urge all Americans to see manipulative spin and propaganda for what it is, and to discount negative attack ads that manipulate people to get them to vote for politicians who claim the mantle of being "conservatives". These are people who try to deceive people into supporting policies that favor billionaires in an ultimate political "bait-and-switch scheme" that involves a Machiavellian machination that stokes sentiments opposed to Big Government, makes economic inequalities worse, scapegoats immigrants, subtly preaches discrimination and racism, restricts women's rights, suppresses voting rights, undermines both the common good and Golden Rule fairness principles, and irresponsibly foists terrible resource depletion, environmental damages and monetary debt upon our children and all people in the future.

"It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institution and merely lukewarm defenders in those who gain by the new ones."

--- Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Filmmaker Annie Leonard provides a provocative perspective of her activist efforts to make the world a better place. She notes that she began to effect change like a sprinter, then realized that her efforts needed to be more like a marathon: "We need to pace ourselves for decades of work to build our economy to be sustainable and healthy". Then, today she realizes that we are really in a relay race: "To create the world we want, it's going to take many many dedicated people over many decades. No matter how fast or how far I run, I am only one in a long line. One of the most important things I can do is connect with, inspire and collaborate with others to grow the strength of our team."

Then again, really big issues like those related to ecological and human population overshoot warn us not to delay too long before agreeing to take bold steps to a safer future.

INSPIRATION:

Joni Mitchell's 'Both Sides Now':

I've looked at clouds from both sides now
 From up and down, and still somehow
 It's cloud illusions I recall
 I really don't know clouds at all

But now old friends are acting strange
 They shake their heads, they say I've changed
 Well something's lost, but something's gained
 In living every day

I've looked at life from both sides now
 From win and lose and still somehow
 It's life's illusions I recall
 I really don't know life at all

It's curious, and curiouser. There seems to be an imperious Red Queen in each and every one of us, like the one in the 3-D film version of *Alice in Wonderland*. This Red Queen compels us to act in domineering ways with an almost hormonal urgency. Deep down, however, this drive may principally be a cry out for recognition and respect, and it may be a means of attempting to find compensation for feelings of insecurity. Helena Bonham Carter plays the role of the Red Queen in this film. She commands obedience and perversely acts as if she is propelled to puerilely throw obstacles in the path she is trodding with those she loves, as if turmoil is a necessity in important interpersonal relationships, rather than being an unfortunate outcome. Surely there must be a pill for this -- one that makes us larger and emotionally more intelligent, rather than smaller and more foolish!

"Me ineptum." (Latin for "Silly me.")

And Then It Happened

And then, at that moment, a great-horned owl hooted anomalously from the branches of a nearby old oak tree just as a hummingbird seeking sustenance happened to find the intricate yellow petals within red sepals of the particular Crimson Columbine I had been regarding a moment earlier. Naturalists would identify this plant as *Aquilegia formosa*, which is Latin for 'beautiful eagle-shaped petals'. The hummingbird, hungrily acting in its own self-interest to obtain nectar from the flower, as nature would have it, incidentally fulfilled the mutualistic evolutionary purpose of pollinating the Columbine. The pollen at the tips of the Columbine's long protruding yellow stamens adhered to the bird, and was likely to be transferred later to the reproductive male pistil of another nearby Columbine flower. As this scene unfolded, a shadow passed by, and it was that of a black Turkey Vulture gliding in thermals overhead, as if it were a sign that patience, grace and curiosity would be rewarded with interesting developments.

I picture an enlightened being alertly perceiving the moment, like the Buddha, relaxed and thinking nothing, appreciating the warmth of the sunshine and the marvelous beauty of a colorful Columbine growing on a verdant springtime hillside, knowing that existence is a wonder beyond fathoming. Existence, such a philosopher might provisionally conclude, is a wonder best comprehended through holistic awareness, mindful appreciation, and the full acceptance of ephemerality, transcendence, uncertainty, sublimity, and spiritual essence.

To get to the right place, we must head in the right direction.

is sure a lot more honorable than having scurrilously self-serving and anti-social ones! Marry good intentions with smart and fair-minded policies, and you just might have an outstanding recipe for socially positive outcomes!

In an interesting development, Nick Hanauer who used to be a strong supporter of school reform efforts as a key to reducing inequality, has now put his philanthropic efforts behind the initiative for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, saying that putting more money in the hands of the poor is what will drive improvement in schools and across society. For one thing, he said, it would increase what Americans can pay in local taxes to improve their schools, because schools are funded largely by local and state taxes.

Thomas Paine once wrote, "Since we benefit from freedom we should fight to defend it." And, "When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary."

Simon Wiesenthal — "For evil to flourish, it requires only that good men do nothing."

The philosophic Right Honorable Irishman Edmund Burke once wrote, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain is a philosopher, deep ecologist, common sense economist, independent-minded political scientist, journalist, polymath and advocate for providential causes.

In conclusion to these discursive observations, in a moment that resembled a kind of almost religious experience, the reverb in my brain sang out with a feeling that resembled a nautical expression of goodwill: **"May you have fair winds and following seas!"**

This exclamation was motivated by enthusiasm and genuine earnestness. May the world become a better place for all. Let's contribute to making it this way!

Yours Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Hannibal, Missouri

Contrasting Strokes of Insight

Imagine being a member of a book club with some friends who are interested in understanding more about how our brains work AND about issues like the insights achieved by people who have had Near Death Experiences. Your group decides to read the following two books, one after another, both of them written by neuroscientists:

(1) *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*, by Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D. Ms. Taylor had a massive stroke at age 37 that severely impacted her left-brain analytical capabilities, and she gained some amazingly thought-provoking insights from the experience.

(2) *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, by Dr. Eben Alexander. Dr. Alexander had a rare brain infection that suddenly caused him to suffer a full *grand mal* seizure that sent him into a comatose state for a week. During his coma, he felt that he experienced definite proof that there is a God and angels and Heaven and an afterlife.

I'd personally love to hear about the book group discussion that ensues, and what people think and feel about these two descriptions of extraordinary human experiences!

I'll tip my hand: I loved the insights that Jill Bolte Taylor gives to readers, and in contrast, when I read *Proof of Heaven* it made me think of a clever observation about the 17th century French philosopher René Descartes, whose experiences had led him to definitively proclaim, in effect: "I think, therefore I am. (I think.)"

Jill Bolte Taylor's full recovery took many years, but she gained profound insights by seeing the effects of her left-brain stroke and vividly remembering them once she recovered and was able to share her insights through the critical lens of her scientific knowledge of brain anatomy and neurology.

It is ironic that Dr. Taylor related her right brain awareness and experiences through her left-brain abilities after she had recovered. Most of our observations and judgments are formulated in frameworks of words and language, which is the province of the word-oriented left-brain. This is largely how our conscious minds interpret the world. To the left hemisphere of the brain, the perspectives of the image-oriented right brain are substantially a mystery. But the holistic ways of seeing that are the province of the right hemisphere of the brain are crucially valuable, so we should make more concerted efforts to comprehend them!