

# TELLING TWAIN





# TELLING TWAIN

Modernized versions of Mark Twain's  
best stories, with comments, historical  
notes, and resources for storytellers,  
teachers, and readers



Adapted by

Steve Daut



Parkhurst Brothers Publishers  
MARION, MICHIGAN

© Principal text copyright 2018 by Steve Daut. All rights reserved under the laws and treaties of the United States of America and all international copyright conventions and treaties. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, except for brief passages quoted within news, blogs, reviews, or similar works, without the express prior written consent of Permissions Director, Parkhurst Brothers Publishers. The Publisher manages world rights to this work and retains the Susan Schulman Literary Agency of New York City, New York, U.S.A. to execute all rights transactions.

**[www.parkhurstbrothers.com](http://www.parkhurstbrothers.com)**

Consumers may order Parkhurst Brothers books from their favorite online or bricks-and-mortar booksellers, expecting prompt delivery. Parkhurst Brothers books are distributed to the trade through the Chicago Distribution Center. Trade and library orders may be placed through Ingram Book Company, Baker & Taylor, Follett Library Resources, and other book industry wholesalers. To order from Chicago Distribution Center, phone 1-800-621-2736 or fax to 800-621-8476. Copies of this and other Parkhurst Brothers Publishers titles are available to organizations and corporations for purchase in quantity by contacting Special Sales Department at our home office location, listed on our website. Manuscript submission guidelines for this publishing company are available at our website.

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition, 2019

Printing history: 2019 2020 2021 2022 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data: [Pending]

ISBN: Trade Paperback 978162491-YYY-Y  
ISBN: e-book 978162491-ZZZ-Z

Parkhurst Brothers Publishers believes that the universal study of history and the free and open exchange of ideas are essential for the maintenance of our freedoms. We support the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and encourage every citizen to study all sides of public policy questions, making up their own minds.

Cover art, cover design  
Page design by  
Acquired for Parkhurst Brothers Publishers by

Linda D. Parkhurst, Ph.D.  
Susan Harring  
Ted Parkhurst

I dedicate this book to my grandfather,

Louis Eustice Herwig

a Twain-like character who gave me my sense of humor  
and most likely saved my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Recently, I have been fond of calling myself a Ray Bradbury Martian, meaning someone who becomes who they are by absorbing the culture and attitudes of those around them. Given people, opportunity and time, you can become anything. I became a storyteller, for instance, at the encouragement of my wife, but also because friends like Bob Pierce, Nadine Anderson, Dick Dice, Richard Sherburne and others came out to see my performances. Continued encouragement came from fellow members of the Ann Arbor Storytellers Guild, and from storytellers I have met at various conventions and meetings. Considering how many of them there are, it's impossible to call out all of them, and difficult to come up with a complete list.

That being said, I'd like to especially thank Beverly Black, Yvonne Healey, Judy Sima, Jeff Doyle, and Judy Schmidt for helping me in one way or another to move along the path that led to this book. I also want to call out Laura Lee Hayes for encouraging me to attend storytelling conferences and inviting me to co-host the monthly storytelling events that helped me move beyond telling and into a more active role. And thanks also to Jane Fink, who has supported me in many ways, who started me thinking about ways to modify Mark Twain's stories for a modern audience, and also for her comments on the manuscript. And thanks to Ted Parkhurst for understanding my ideas, for seeing the book in them, and for bringing it to life. Ok, I already mentioned my wife, but I have to tell you, she has this amazing ability to roll with the twists and turns as I follow my Martian sensibilities wherever they lead. I'm so grateful that she continues to share this journey into the unknown.

Steve Daut  
Ann Arbor, 2018

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

TIPS FOR TELLING TWAIN .....	15
------------------------------	----

## SECTION 1 – PERSONAL NARRATIVES

CURING A COLD .....	19
---------------------	----

THE KILLING OF JULIUS CAESAR .....	25
------------------------------------	----

JOURNALISM IN TENNESSEE.....	0
------------------------------	---

MY WATCH.....	0
---------------	---

POLITICAL ECONOMY.....	0
------------------------	---

HOW I EDITED AN AGRICULTURAL PAPER .....	0
--	---

ARGUING WITH A RAVEN .....	0
----------------------------	---

THE PROFESSOR’S YARN .....	0
----------------------------	---

## SECTION 2 – STORIES INSPIRED BY “CURRENT EVENTS”

THE WILD MAN INTERVIEWED .....	0
--------------------------------	---

THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF THE GREAT LANDSLIDE.....	0
--	---

RUNNING FOR GOVERNOR.....	0
---------------------------	---

## SECTION 3 – FABLES

A MEDIEVAL ROMANCE .....	0
--------------------------	---

SOME LEARNED FABLES FOR GOOD OLD BOYS AND GIRLS.....	0
---	---

ONE LITTLE TALE .....	0
-----------------------	---

THE FIVE BOONS OF LIFE .....	0
A FABLE.....	0

SECTION 4 – TALL TALES

THE NOTORIOUS JUMPING FROG OF CALAVERAS COUNTY .....	0
THE UNDERTAKER’S CHAT .....	0
EXPERIENCE OF THE MCWILLIAMSES WITH MEMBRANEOUS COUP .....	0
A GHOST STORY .....	0
THE SALESMAN’S TALE .....	0
MRS. MCWILLIAMS AND THE LIGHTNING .....	0
THE MCWILLIAMSES AND THE BURGLAR ALARM .....	0
THE THIRY-THOUSAND DOLLAR BEQUEST .....	0
EXCERPT FROM CAPTAIN STORMFIELD’S VISIT TO HEAVEN.....	0
BONUS STORY - PASTOR (YOUR NAME HERE) .....	0
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	0



## INTRODUCTION

When Samuel Langhorne Clemens was 18, he left home to work as a printer, and then from age 22 to 26, he worked on the river, becoming a licensed pilot before he left that life. One of the things he liked to do was go out on the sounding boats to measure the water depth with a sounding pole. Many of the poles were 12 feet long, with marks indicating depth in fathoms, each fathom being six feet. Most of the riverboats could navigate in less than one fathom. Anything more than that meant the way was clear, so full speed ahead. At the full depth of the pole, two fathoms, the call from sounder to wheelhouse would be “mark, twain.” Clemens first wrote under the pen name of Mark Twain in 1863.

Samuel Clemens was not the first to write under that pen name. In *Life on the Mississippi*, he wrote about an ancient Mississippi mariner, Captain Isaiah Sellers, who apparently took his first steamboat trip in 1811, and was venerated even among the elder pilots of the day. Although not a writer himself, Captain Sellers occasionally would write short articles about the river for the *New Orleans Picayune* and sign them “Mark Twain.” Clemens borrowed heavily from one of these essays for his own first newspaper article, earning him the lifelong ire of Captain Sellers. According to Clemens, the Captain never wrote another paragraph and never again used the name “Mark Twain,” and when Captain Sellers died, Clemens adopted the name for his own writing.

Twain was an incredibly prolific writer. Not only was he a humorist and storyteller, but he had highly tuned hypocrisy and irony detectors, and a biting and insightful way of recording his findings. His articles and letters were published in the *Hannibal Journal*, *The Enterprise*, *The Golden Era*, *The Californian*, the *Sacramento Union*, *Alta California*, *New York Herald*, *New York Tribune*, *Galaxy Magazine*, and many other publications. He lectured on an immense array of topics and published not only novels but various collections of works that ranged from short stories to novellas and travelogues.

At times, it's hard to distinguish between his stories and his essays or rants. Some of that is by design, but some of it is most likely because his mind was free-ranging. Some of his stories lack any discernible structure, and many of them mix actual events with pure tall-tale-telling. But each one shows clearly the Twain style, which is characterized by intensely held positions, punctuated by wry and often biting humor, with a deep devotion to irony. Yet he does it with a humane graciousness that we all need to take note of these days. He showed a proclivity toward laughing at himself nearly as hard as he laughed at others, and that, perhaps, is Twain's best gift to us.

Even today, 160 years after he penned his first story, we still hear about Mark Twain. Perhaps someone read the "Jumping Frog" story to you as a child, and that's the last you heard about him. There are books available but few verbal presentations of his work. One reason may be the issue of story structure. Audiences today like a story that has a shape and structure to

it, and often an original Twain tale is more of an anecdote or a series of funny events with no discernible protagonist and antagonist except for a hapless Twain (or a character who is telling him a story) beset by the vagaries of life. A second reason may be, ironically, also one of the reasons for his success, which is his ability to turn a phrase in a way that laughs at itself by bringing in the ironies of the day. This can lead to verbose and quirky prose that has a tendency to freeze itself in time. The challenge of telling Twain for today's audience is to find the universal in his prose while updating the language to a pace and phrasing that doesn't distract a modern audience from the storyline.

Most of the more contemporary Twain books that I have run across are for children, which is ironic since Twain did not typically write for children. Even Hal Holbrook, who has presented his adult-geared program *Mark Twain Tonight* over 2100 times beginning in 1966, retired just this past year. It's prime time to make sure Twain's rich legacy is carried into the future.

Many of the stories in the book are highly condensed from their original form. The language and sentence structure have been simplified, while I've attempted to retain the character and insightful turns of phrase that are characteristic Twain. I have also built some classic structure into many of the retellings in this book, locking a hero and villain in a struggle, however inane the struggle might be. There are introductions to each of the stories, and with some, I add ideas or tips that might

be helpful to tellers or readers. In addition, where the humor is tied to Twain's reaction to events of the time, I have tried to add in the things that audiences of Twain's time would be aware of in order to make the humor work. In a few cases, I have presented some alternative ways of telling in order to facilitate your success as a storyteller or reader of these stories.

With a number of the stories (eg., *My Watch*, *The McWilliamses and the Burglar Alarm*), Twain breaks up the original story with little subplots and asides that he revisits over and over again. Not only does that make the story sound repetitive in the telling, but I find it very easy to lose my place if I'm telling a story with that sort of structure. So I have extensively rearranged those stories to overcome my crummy memory. If you are able to keep track of where you are with the more complicated original structure, let me know, and I will worship at your storytelling feet.

When I began to consider how to arrange the stories in this book, I didn't want to simply default to a chronological listing because Twain has so many distinct narrative styles. I wanted to sort them out a bit. Twain eschewed categories, as I mentioned earlier, so putting the stories into distinct boxes is a bit tricky. At any rate, I have sorted the stories into what I consider personal narratives, stories inspired by current events, fables, and tall tales. A few of the stories fall into more than one category, so I put them into the one that seems the most prominent. Within each category, they are listed chronologically. Perhaps a more scholarly type would find my distinctions completely wrong,

but philosophically, I have always felt that not knowing what you're doing is never a reason to avoid doing it. Regarding any creative pursuit, a former boss and mentor once told me, "If you know exactly what you're doing, you're already too late."

I started on this book after telling Twain tales for a few years, and also creating and telling my own stories. At one point, I was working on a new personal story when a storytelling friend, Laura Lee Hayes, commented that it sounded like Twain was beginning to inhabit my psyche. She hastened to add, "That's a really good thing." For the fun of it, I have concluded this book with that story, which you have my permission to tell as long as you begin with something like, "This story was told to me by a wonderful storyteller by the name of Steve Daut." Feel free to change the word "wonderful" to "brilliant," "incredible," "insightful," "hilarious," or some other highly complementary modifiers. Or all of the above.

Some quick notes regarding Copyright and Bibliography: According to reputable sources, including the United States Copyright office, any stories published before 1923 are in the public domain, and therefore may be freely quoted or reproduced in its entirety, without permission or fees. In addition, derivative works may also be created from them. The stories in this book are derived from originals first published in 1907 or earlier and are considered derivative works, which results in a mix of copyrighted and public domain bits in each of the stories. Every attempt has been made to find the earliest publication possible although that might not be the

version I used. In every case, the source was published well before 1923. Sources are listed in the bibliography, and first publication dates are included with the title of each story. The bibliography also lists a number of references that may be of interest, including some original articles that are available in PDF format online through the Library of Congress. I didn't use all of them, but hey, I did the work of finding them so I figured I'd pass them along if anyone is interested. I also have listed *The Purloining of Prince Oleomargarine*, a newly published, illustrated children's book based on an unfinished Twain story that was recently discovered. I didn't use it for anything, but it's a pretty cool book.

The stories in this book can be read, but they are also designed to be told. Some of the longer ones are more of a challenge to tell, so rather than rote memorization, I tend to get the sense of the language used and the flow of events, then add a bit of improvisation to keep things lively. Frankly, some of the longer ones are just easier to read or condense even further. You are invited to take what works, modify it to meet your own needs and present it in a way that makes sense to you. To the extent that you borrow directly from this work in your own storytelling, I'd appreciate a nod of recognition according to your own conscience. On the other hand, please don't copy or post any of this in electronic, written, or another permanent form without first asking for permission.

Most of all, enjoy the stories!



## TIPS FOR TELLING TWAIN

Everyone knows Mark Twain, or at least they know who he was. Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn are standard fare in children's literature, and in movies both realistic and animated. Some readers may know of Mark Twain from Hal Holbrook's 1967 movie, *Mark Twain Tonight*, or from Holbrook's performance tour. It seems to me that this is a blessing and a trap. Mark Twain was brilliant at branding himself with his shock of crazy white hair, his massive horseshoe mustache, and his characteristic vested white suit. This, of course, is the image that Holbrook used so effectively for 50 years.

But there is another Mark Twain behind that image, a Mark Twain who wrote and spoke passionately about social issues and reacted to the headlines of the day. Not all of Twain's work is light and humorous, or even contains the characteristic folksy quality that modern audiences expect of him. He wrote many articles anonymously, often taking radical or unpopular positions on social norms of the times. So if you are going to tell Mark Twain stories, you have a decision to make. Do you take the re-enactor role ala Holbrook and become the classic Twain persona, or do you scratch a little deeper and seek out Samuel Clemens, the real person behind the Twain stories?

I have chosen in this book, and also when I tell Twain stories, to honor the beauty and depth of each story by telling each in a way that grows out of my own personal style. Not only is a modern audience unlikely to sit through the original fifteen-thousand word original version of *Excerpt From Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, but lacking the historical context of much of the language, even if it is delivered flawlessly, not many people would understand more than half of it.

So the idea for me is to find the beauty, the irony, sarcasm, and sentimentality that Twain intended and discover my own way to deliver it to today's audiences. The thing that works best for me is to tip my hat to Twain (metaphorically or actually), and then tell each story in the way it demands. I tend to tell some stories like *A Medieval Romance* in a fairy-tale style, and *A Ghost Story* as if it is a Victorian Tale, because these seem to be the styles that Clemens was attempting to mimic. On the other hand, it feels more natural to adopt a folksy Twain-like style when telling *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*. But even when I tell *Frog*, the folksy style I adopt is one that flows naturally for me, not an imitation of what I imagine it would sound like from Twain's mouth. The idea is that I am serving the story, not my impression, or the audience's impression, of how Mark Twain would do it.

When it comes to telling these stories, I have found that less is more. Rather than a full-blown costume, I may don some clothes that invoke the 1860s – railroad pants and suspenders. When I tell *My Watch*, I might pull out a replica pocket watch,



because younger audiences especially might not have any idea of what an actual watch looks like, and it's a stretch to expect them to understand a watch that doesn't run on a battery. A simple prop that you can pull out and demonstrate goes a long ways toward making the story come alive without a lot of explanation.

So to underscore the main thought here, I'd suggest that the best result comes from forgetting for a moment that the story was written by Mark Twain, and deciding the most effective way to bring your own style to the story. If you find a story of interest but have a hard time with the way it appears in this book, I've provided quite a bit of source material in the bibliography so that you can go back to the original and create a version that works better for you. Once you have found something that works for you, you might want to add a little introduction to put it into context. Feel free to use the introductory notes that I provide for the stories, or to delve into the fascinating history of each story on your own.

Section One

**PERSONAL NARRATIVES**



INTRODUCTION TO

## CURING A COLD

I found this story in the May 24, 1867 issue of the *Marshall County Republican* (Plymouth, Indiana). As with many of Twain's articles, the original claims to be advice for readers and then progresses into a tall tale, with various asides to the readers to ground it as a true, but cautionary, tale. Because of Twain's original introduction, I included it here, rather in the section on tall tales. I also removed the asides, as they chopped up the narrative without much benefit, although I left the ending largely as it was. Twain's original introduction is as follows:

It is a good thing, perhaps, to write for the amusement of the public, but it is a far higher and nobler thing to write for their instruction, their profit, their actual and tangible benefit. The latter is the sole object of this article. If it proves the means of restoring to health one solitary sufferer among my race, of lighting up once more the fire of hope and joy in his faded eyes, of bringing back to his dead heart again the quick, generous impulses of other days, I shall be amply rewarded for my labor; my soul will be permeated with the sacred delight a Christian feels when he has done a good, unselfish deed.

Having led a pure and blameless life, I am justified in believing that no man who knows me will reject the suggestions I am about to make, out of fear that I am trying to deceive him. Let the public do itself the honor to read my experience in doctoring a cold, as herein set forth, and then follow in my footsteps.



## CURING A COLD

Adapted by Steve Daut,  
Twain original first published in 1867

My constitution succumbed to a severe cold caused by undue exertion in getting ready to do something. The first time I began to sneeze, a friend told me to go and bathe my feet in hot water and go to bed. I did so. Shortly afterward, another friend advised me to get up and take a cold shower. I did that also. Within the hour another friend assured me that it was policy to “feed a cold and starve a fever.” I had both. So I thought it best to fill myself up for the cold, and then stop eating and let the fever starve awhile.

In a case of this kind, I seldom do things by halves. I ate petty heartily. I started down toward the office, and on the way encountered another bosom friend, who told me that a quart of salt water, taken warm, would come as near to curing a cold as anything in the world. I hardly thought I had room for it, but I tried it anyhow. The result was surprising. I believe I threw up my immortal soul.

It may be a good enough remedy, but I think it’s too severe. If I had another cold in the head, and there were no course left me

but to take either an earthquake or a quart or warm salt water, I would take my chances on the earthquake.

After the storm which had been raging in my stomach had subsided, and no more good Samaritans came along, I went on borrowing handkerchiefs again and blowing them to atoms, as had been my custom in the early stages of my cold. Then I came across a lady who had just arrived from over the plains and had from necessity acquired considerable skill in the treatment of simple "family complaints." I knew she must have a lot of experience, for she appeared to be a hundred and fifty years old.

She mixed a concoction composed of molasses, aqua fortis, turpentine and various other drugs, and instructed me to take a wine-glass full of it every fifteen minutes. I took one dose. That was enough. It robbed me of all moral principle, and awoke every unworthy impulse of my nature. Under its malign influence, my brain conceived miracles of meanness, but my hands were too feeble to execute them. If my strength had not surrendered to the succession of assaults from infallible cold remedies, I am convinced that I would have tried to rob the Graveyard.

Like most people, I often feel mean and act accordingly. But until I took that medicine, I had never reveled in such supernatural depravity and felt proud of it. At the end of two days, I was ready to go to doctoring again. I took a few more unflinching remedies and finally drove my cold from my head to my lungs.

I started coughing incessantly, and my voice fell to a thundering bass, two octaves below my natural tone. I could only fall to sleep by coughing myself into a state of utter exhaustion, and then the moment I began to talk in my sleep, my discordant voice woke me up again.

My case grew more and more serious every day. Plain gin was recommended. I took it. Then gin and molasses, and I took that also. Then gin and onions. I added the onions, and took all three. I detected no particular result, except that I had acquired breath like a buzzard's.

I decided to travel for my health. I went to Lake Bigler with my comrade, Wilson. We traveled in considerable style. We sailed and hunted and fished and danced all day, and I doctored my cough all night. I thought that all of this outdoor activity would help me to improve day by day. But my disease continued to grow worse.

A sheet bath was recommended. I had no idea what a sheet bath was, but had never rejected a remedy yet, so it seemed poor policy to refuse. It was administered at midnight, and the weather was very frosty. My breast and back were bared, and sheets soaked in ice water were wound round me until I resembled a swab for a muzzle-loading cannon.

It is a cruel expedient. When the chilly rag touched my warm flesh, it made me start with sudden violence and gasp for breath. It froze the marrow in my bones and stopped the beating of my heart. I thought my time had come.

When the sheet bath failed to cure my cough, a lady friend recommended the application of a mustard plaster to my breast. I believe that would have cured me effectually if it had not been for young Wilson. When I went to bed, I put my mustard plaster where I could reach it when I was ready for it. But young Wilson got hungry in the night and ate it.

Alter sojourning a week at Lake Bigler, I went to Steamboat Springs, and beside the steam baths, I took a lot of the vilest medicines that were ever concocted. They would have cured me, but I managed to aggravate my disease by carelessness and undue exposure.

Finally, a lady I met in San Francisco told me to drink a quart of whiskey every twenty-four hours, and another friend recommended precisely the same course. Each advised me to take a quart - that made half a gallon. I did it and still live.

Now, with the kindest motives in the world, I suggest that consumptive patients should try the variegated course of treatment I have gone through. If it doesn't cure them, it can't do more than kill them.