

# *Quote Me: Quick Quote* - Episode 8

“Mark Twain: Between Two Comets”

## Transcript

Koen: Hey, everybody. Welcome to *Quick Quote*, a *Quote Me* mini episode. This is Koen.

Ian: I'm Ian.

John: John's here.

Anna: I'm Anna. I didn't like that change [laughter]. Ian's going to talk to us today about an author.

Ian: Okay, so for this *Quick Quote* episode I chose Mark Twain, who is often called the father of American literature, and he truly lived an extraordinary life. So, Mark Twain was born Samuel Clemens on November 30th, 1835, in the small town of Florida, Missouri. His parents, John and Jane Clemens, had seven kids. Samuel was the second youngest. Only three of his siblings, though, would live to adulthood. So, he kind of had a rough life as a child. He was born two months prematurely and was not expected to live past infancy. He remained sickly and frail until he was about seven years old. And when he was four, his family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, on the banks of the Mississippi River, which later novels *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* settings were based on fictional towns resembling Hannibal and Mark Twain. A lot of his writing he would take from his past experiences, as do most authors. In 1847, he dropped out of school, and he started working with the Hannibal Gazette. And from 1847 until about 1857, he worked at different newspaper companies, mostly as an apprentice and typesetter. In that time, he traveled from St. Louis to New York to Philadelphia, Washington, DC before returning back to New York. The lack of jobs, though, brought him back to Missouri, so he did a lot of traveling when he was younger, and during that time he kind of lived a

directionless life and it kind of took him just wherever he could find work. His life started to settle down a little bit around 1857 when he started work and was trained as a Mississippi River steamboat pilot. And by 1861, he had piloted over a dozen boats from St. Louis to New Orleans. He began his career as a steamboat pilot, starting as an understudy, and he claimed that these were some of the happiest days of his life until tragedy struck. He got his brother a job in 1859 on the steamboat, Pennsylvania. But in a freak accident, the boiler exploded and killed his brother.

Koen: [Time: 2:59] Wait, just his brother or like everybody?

Ian: It killed, not everyone on the boat. Mark was on the boat and he survived. Yeah, but it was. He did carry the weight of that guilt the rest of his life. But during this time, as a steamboat pilot, he really filled his life with ambition and possibility. It's kind of like a growing up period for him. And then in 1861, when the Civil War started, traffic halted along the Mississippi. So, he traveled with his brother, Orion, to the Nevada territory, which a little side note, his brother owned a newspaper, which was very influential in helping Abraham Lincoln get elected in 1860. So, he was named the, pretty much the governor of the Nevada territory. So, Mark Twain went out there with them. He worked and he prospected for Silver before becoming a local reporter. Shortly after, though, he did move to San Francisco to avoid getting in trouble because he set up a duel with a local person in town. Okay, so, Nevada did have strict no dueling laws. So, Mark Twain- [laughter]

Anna: Just don't shoot each other.

Ian: Well, it was common back then. So, Twain was like: "I'm, I'm leaving Dodge. I'm getting out of here before I get in trouble." He didn't want to be prosecuted.

John: [Time 4:30] I just want to backtrack for a minute because I think we kind of glossed over it. Did Mark Twain kill somebody?

Ian: No. Before the duel happened, he left town.

John: Okay? Yeah. He didn't actually do anything wrong.

Ian: They set up the duel, and then he was like, I'm going to get arrested, so I need to get out of here.

John: Okay. All right.

Koen: So that makes more sense.

John: I needed to square that in my head.

Ian: Yeah. No, there was no, the duel never happened for the record.

John: Because if we just play and then Mark Twain got away with murder and went to the Sandwich Islands [laughter], you know, like, it just would have been very totally jarring for me. Sorry, everybody.

Ian: So, he travels to San Francisco and becomes a traveling reporter for the newspaper. He also wrote for the San Francisco Union while he was out there. And during this time, he even went to the Sandwich Islands.

John: Sandwich Islands. Where's that at?

Ian: That is present day Hawaii.

John: Really?

Ian: Yes.

Koen: Why'd they call it the Sandwich Islands?

Ian: I have no clue. We'll have to look that up.

John: Very interesting.

Ian: Yeah. So he went there as a correspondent, was writing, sending letters back to the Sacramento Union to be published.

Koen: According to History.com, it's because Captain James Cook, he traveled to the Hawaiian Islands and he landed on Waimea, the island of Kauai. And he named that island group the Sandwich Islands because of the Earl of Sandwich, John Montagu.

Ian: [Time: 6:00] Makes sense.

Anna: Who, when I look that up because we have to take a break, is also the first Lord of Admiralty. Interesting [laughter].

Koen: So, in case you were wondering, sandwiches, very admirable... [laughter] by Cook.

Anna: He cooked a sandwich.

John: You can't make some things up, it's just.

Ian: You really can't.

John: Too perfect.

Ian: He would later claim in a public speech that Virginia City, Nevada, was, quote: "no place for a Presbyterian." And after a thoughtful pause, added, and "I did not remain one very long." Although he did expose fraud and corruption whenever he saw it. In 1863, Samuel Clemens first used the name Mark Twain while writing a correspondence out West. Mark Twain was a nod to his old steamboat pilot days as crewmen would shout Mark Twain when the water was deep enough to safely navigate. Twain was an old-fashioned way of saying to as in two fathoms are roughly 12 feet deep. In 1865, he would publish his first short story, which many consider his first great success. And he would go on to publish another three books over the next seven years. In 1867, he would take a trip which was funded by a local newspaper to the Mediterranean and also toward Europe in

the Middle East as well. In 1870, he was married into a wealthy family when he married Olivia Langdon. He met Olivia Langdon through his travels when he was traveling over the Mediterranean and Europe. He actually met her brother, and her brother introduced the two. Through her family, he hung out with abolitionists, socialists, activists for women's rights and proponents for social equality, including Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass. He was very outspoken on issues such as slavery, racism, and animal cruelty. So, over the next ten years, I'm going to kind of fast forward a little bit, he stayed in the northeast. He did travel to London a little bit before settling down in Connecticut in 1874. During this time, he had four children. Although the boy passed away at the age of 19 months. In 1876, he publishes *Tom Sawyer*. During the 1880s, he writes three more novels, including his most famous *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Unfortunately, during this time, though, due to bad investments, he was falling deeper in debt. His investment in the page typewriter alone would cost him over \$200,000.

Koen: [Time: 8:45] Just to clarify, \$200,000 in 1890 is worth \$6,318,769.23 today.

John: Wow.

Ian: So crazy.

John: That's a big kick in the teeth.

Koen: For a typewriter...

Ian: Yeah. So, he was a really good author, but he was not a good businessman. Sadly, the crippling debt would cause him and his family to have to sell their house. And they actually moved to Europe because, believe it or not, it was cheaper to live over in Europe than it was in America. In 1894. He filed for personal bankruptcy, which led him to embark on another speaking tour. That was another thing he would do is he would make these bad investments and then he would go on these speaking tours and make up all that money [laughter].

Koen: He's in a cycle

Ian: [Time 9:35] There's like 20, 20 years or so where he would do that for sure.

John: This is going to be the one I got a feeling!

Ian: So, he did meet a Standard Oil executive, which Standard Oil was owned by Andrew Carnegie, which was also a friend of his. And by 1898 he was able to pay off all his debts. And in the early 1900s was when he started his autobiography.

Koen: Wait, so you said Carnegie?

Ian: Yeah.

Koen: Like, *the* Carnegie.

Ian: Yeah. Andrew Carnegie. This guy had friends everywhere.

Koen: That's wild.

Ian: Yeah...

Anna: [Time: 10:05] If my, if my friend. Well, maybe not. Maybe not if he just keeps throwing money away at stupid like stupid things [laughter] they're not taking, maybe I wouldn't help him out.

John: What I'm really learning is that Mark Twain knew everybody. And like, if you knew Mark, I mean, you were like a person or two away from knowing, like anyone in the country, possibly the world.

Koen: Like possibly the world.

Ian: I'm going to go over later with a few of his other friends that he had.

Anna: Cool.

Ian: He would later say that he became: "...a silver miner in Nevada, a newspaper reporter, a gold miner in California, a reporter in San Francisco, a special correspondent in the Sandwich Islands, a roving correspondent in Europe and in the East, an instructional torchbearer on the lecture platform. And finally, I became a scribbler of books and an immovable fixture among the other rocks of New England." So just a few crazy facts about Mark Twain. First of all, he loved cats. He had over 19 cats at one time. Some of his cats' names were Apollinaris, Beelzebub, Blatherskite, Buffalo Bill, Sin, Sour mash, Tammany, Soapy Saul, Pestilence, and Bambino [laughter].

Anna: [Time 11:20] Soapy Saul? Soapy Saul?

Ian: Those are some great names.

Anna: Come here Soapy.

Ian: He once said, quote: "When a man loves cats, I am his friend and comrade without further introduction." It was said that he loved cats more than people. And one of my favorite Mark Twain stories involves cats. When a friend was telling a story that Mark was about to open a screen door leading into a hall when two little kittens ran up and stood there waiting for him to open the door, he then politely gave a low bow, stepped back to open the door and said, quote: "Walk in, gentlemen. I always give precedence to royalty." End quote [laughter].

Koen: What a dork.

John: I love Mark Twain. I'm sold on this man.

Ian: He was also an early member of the Society of Psychical Research, which dealt with paranormal activity. He was close friends with Nicholas Tesla and spent a lot of time in his laboratory. He was also friends with Helen Keller for over 16 years, and in 1909 his close friend Thomas Edison filmed him at his house and created the only known video of Twain.

Anna: How was he friends with Tesla and Edison?

Ian: That's a good question. Me and John were talking about that earlier.

John: [Time 12:46] We were we were trying to figure that out. Like, I asked Ian, like, now, when the video was taken, did Mark know that Edison was there or was he, like, spying on him? [laughter] Like: "This is how I get the secrets. This is how I figure out what Tesla is up to."

Ian: I don't think all three of them hung out together. I think it was like, you know, going back and forth type thing.

Anna: Could you imagine if Twain was the. The bridge? [laughter]

John: Now, the version of the video that Ian and I found had "Dance of the Sugarplum Fairies" set to it. And it's just Twain, like walking down like his front steps and around his house set to "Dance of the Sugarplum Fairies."

Anna: Interesting.

John: I don't know if Edison originally included that music or if that's like a modern, like, addition for this one video. But it was.

Anna: Fun. Who knows?

Ian: [Time 13:38] Okay, so he was also an inventor, although only one of his inventions was successful. A self-pasting scrapbook with dry adhesive that only had to be dampened. And he was also an early proponent of the forensic use of fingerprinting techniques and solving crimes. He even mentioned it in one of his works. His autobiography is over Half a million Words, and the guy was just an extraordinary person. So, I'm going to leave with-



Koen: [Time 14:10] Sorry, I just want to say a novel is considered like 50 to 60000 words. So, you're saying like five, 500,000 words?

Ian: 500,000 words over the course of years. He didn't write it all. He dictated a lot of it and had someone write for him.

Koen: Still enormous.

Ian: If you go up to it, we have his autobiography and if you go up there, it's like three books that take up this much shelf space.

John: I mean, if you think about.

Anna: For the people listening at home, Ian is...

Ian: About two, two feet maybe? [laughter]

Anna: We're professionals.

Ian: So, Mark Twain passed away in 1910, but in 1909, he did say, quote: "I came in with Halley's Comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Haley's comet. The Almighty has said no doubt. Now, here are these two unaccountable freaks. They came in together and they must go out together." He passed away one day after Halley's Comet appeared, and he was only survived by his daughter.

Koen: That's awesome.

John: Wasn't that wild.

Koen: That's so cool!

John: [Time 15:26] What a cool guy.

Koen: Like, what a neat guy. He knew everybody.

John: He knew everyone. He did everything. I mean, no wonder the autobiography was like half a million words. Like you got exploding riverboats, and duels and-

Koen: I'm sure half of it was like conversations he had with his cats. So.

Ian: For sure,

Anna: 100%.

John: All 19 cats.

Ian: What a great life he had.

John: Yeah.

Ian: Other than a bankruptcy, just fantastic [laughter].

Koen: It's fine, he figured it out.

John: The repeated business failures.

Anna: Bankruptcy, you know.

John: All the death and the bankruptcy.

Ian: The last thing I will say is a lot of sources I read said that everyone accounted for his strong moral character. That was one thing that he was known for, was always doing the right thing, like when he was out in Nevada calling out corruption, calling out extortion, when at that time you could literally be murdered for that. But he always had a sense of

what's right. And that's one thing I really admired about Mark Twain and learning about him.

Koen: [Time 16:24] Well, thank you, everyone, for listening.

Ian: Yes, thank you.

Koen: We all love Mark Twain now.

John: Yes.

Koen: Please join us again next month and we'll see you then. Good bye.

Everyone: Goodbye!

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