



oh
MYYY!

THERE GOES THE INTERNET

GEORGE TAKEI

Oh Myyy!

there goes the internet

George Takei

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Dedicated to

my husband Brad Takei,
who swore I had it in me
to write another book

and to

my trusty interns,
who demanded
not to be named.

Oh Myyyy!

How in the world did a common, everyday exclamation come to be so associated with me? “Oh My!” truly has become my signature. Many people ask me about when I started saying it, but it was actually something I’d been using all my life. “Oh my!” Doesn’t everybody say it? “Oh my!” Now somehow, it’s become my brand. For this, I put the blame squarely on one world-renowned rascal named Howard Stern.

I had been on Howard Stern’s radio show many times since the early 90s — a few times intentionally, but more often not. The times I purposefully appeared were to promote a play I was in or the publication of my autobiography, *To the Stars*. But more frequently, I’d been “on” because of my bandit recordings. Once, Howard surreptitiously recorded me while on the phone with a celebrity impersonator pretending, absurdly, to be Ricardo Montalban.

Howard Stern has had his fun with me, and his listeners seemed to be having a hilarious good time listening to his mischief at my expense. I got points for being a good sport, I suppose. The Stern Show techies even spliced my voice from the audiocassette version of my autobiography and manipulated the words to make it seem like I was uttering outrageously obscene statements. They claim they did all this because they love me, but I must say, I’ve never been loved in such a bizarre fashion.

Howard also seemed to have fallen in love with me saying “Oh my!” whenever he said or did something outrageous, like when he asked one voluptuous young woman on his show to take her bra off. “Oh my!” What else could I say? It was even more apt when she did. “Oh my!” indeed. Howard, for some unfathomable reason, thought my reflexive “Oh my!” was hilarious. So he played the recording of it over and over again — even when I wasn’t on the show. I thought it was silly, but it was also admittedly quite droll.

I first realized “Oh my!” was becoming personally linked with me when I went on a national book tour for *To the Stars*. Young men who had patiently stood in line for my autograph would slip the book toward me with roguishly insinuating smiles and ask me to sign it with “Oh my!” I knew right away they were Howard Stern fans and realized then that it had become my signature phrase.

“Oh my!” goes beyond a response of amusement or surprise. It is also an expression of awe and wonder. Our world is full of amazing phenomena: a stunningly rapturous sunrise, a night sky spangled with stardust, the fiery beauty of a volcanic lava flow. They all merit a “Oh my!” Humankind’s imagination and innovation is truly breathtaking. Today we take for granted technology that was mere science fiction just over four decades ago on *Star Trek*. I am a 75-year old man who grew up transported by adventures I experienced with my ears glued to the radio. When black and white television was introduced, that was a sensational “Oh my!” event. We could see a movie on a round screen in a box in our own living room. What a groundbreaking invention!

Our dazzling tech-driven society today stimulates and inspires me. We have become instantaneously interconnected, not only with other people of this earth, but with far-off planets. A robot we created is now roving the surface of Mars and sending back photos to us on Earth — what an amazing achievement. I want to revel in and enjoy this “Oh my!” world — so much so, that I’ve begun to accentuate the very phrase. As we all know, the addition of a few Ys adds a certain *je ne sais quoi*. “Hey” simply doesn’t quite carry the same suggestive appeal in a text message as the more inviting “Heyyyy.” And with that, “Oh myyyy!” was born.

As many a fan has posted on my Facebook wall,



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Don't worry, it took me a while to get this, too.

Status Symbolism

Social media depends on the act of sharing. “Duh,” you say. But what is less clear is *why* we choose to share things through our social networks. Sure, we want to keep our friends and family current, particularly when something significant happens. “I got a job promotion.” “I’m a mom again.” “I need bail money.” But that hardly scratches the surface of our modern sharing rituals.

Once upon a time, we had to call or write to everyone we knew with such news. More dutiful friends shared an annual family photo and penned lengthy, formal Christmas letters, complete with “Dear X” salutation (likely filled in by hand in textbook cursive) and a yearly summary of the notable achievements and news (usually in hard-to-read italic typeset on even harder-to-read blue or red paper). Those chestnuts are rather scarce now in this age of status posting. Perhaps those same people today could simply email a holiday greeting with a link to their Facebook Timelines, all major Life Events carefully laid out, each album informatively and accurately titled, each photo automatically enhanced with red-eye removed.

But beyond important news, let’s face it: Facebook and Twitter are filled with information no one really needs to know. “At the gym.” “Ate donuts for dinner.” “Got shingles.”

It’s harder to understand why people post this information, and admittedly harder still to understand why we continue to devour it on a daily basis. We post in the sincere hope of providing others a more honest and open sense of who we are, from the very special moments to the mundane. Sharing is an act of trust, for ridicule is an ever-present risk on the Internet today. But I’ve recently concluded that sharing is also often an act of deception. More on that later.

On a deeper level, the sharing of our lives on a daily basis is a statement of our values and what makes us tick. In so doing, friends who are far away may feel close by, and long lost acquaintances or relationships may resurface, often with alarming results.

Monique [profile picture] I hope Mrs. Johanson is at the reunion, she was the best teacher/my favorite of all of CHS!
Wednesday at 3:13pm · Like · Comment · Subscribe

👍 4 people like this.

Thomas [profile picture] YAYA!! i had her too!
Wednesday at 4:14pm · Like

Larry [profile picture] WTF that lady was youre favorite teacher?!? she a bitch cuz of her i had 2 take summer school!
Wednesday at 6:12pm · Like

[profile picture] Johanson Sadly, I will not be able to attend, but thank you all for inviting me to the group. Larry, I am sorry you feel that way. Obviously my grammar lessons didn't stick too well.
Wednesday at 10:00pm · Like

Jack [profile picture] LMFAO! BURN!!! GO MRS J!!!!
Wednesday at 10:42pm · Like

Larry [profile picture] w/ever i couldnt say it n hs so i say it now U R A BITHC!
Yesterday at 10:02am · Like

[profile picture] Johanson Larry, you can barely say it now. Also, you could have said that in High School, because "BITHC" isn't a real word. I am going to use my context clues and assume you are attempting to call me a bitch. In that case, I will point out that your facebook information lets me know that you are currently single and unemployed. Who is the bitch now?
Yesterday at 10:45am · Like · 🔄 1 person

It is easy to underestimate the impact our hyper-connectivity has upon us as individuals and on the human species in general. We are naturally social creatures, but at least until recently our social interactions were limited to those we saw, spoke to, worked with, and slept with (or stopped sleeping with) daily. In the networked world, there are fewer Eleanor Rigbys to sing about, for even the loneliest among us can venture out with relative anonymity and find solace in the comfort of other lives, particularly if those lives appear equally mundane. By the way, if you don't know who Eleanor Rigby is, you probably were born after 1985 and need to listen to some real music.

There is a voyeuristic quality to it all as well. Before we had Facebook, we began our obsession with reality television, where we followed the lives of complete strangers and watched their dramas unfold, breathless with anticipation for the next meltdown. Smartly edited by experienced producers, these shows made television audiences feel as if they had been invited into someone else's world. And here's the rub: by witnessing the rawness of the emotions, on full display for us all to take in, these "real" people felt like our colleagues, our friends, our families.

Facebook and Twitter started out like poorly funded cable access reality shows, running 24/7 with limited but ever-increasing commercial interruption. But instead of seeing the daily drama of strangers, we reveled in the streaming peeks into the lives of those we actually knew, one finger pressed firmly on the pulses of their existence. It became easier than ever to compare our own lives to theirs, and to see if the grass really was greener.

But things morphed quickly on Facebook due to a little button called "like." The only real way we could tell whether anyone cared about what we did was if friends hit that button. Our Facebook experience became, as they say, "game-ified." Rather quickly, the savvier "producers" among us began to edit and present their lives to achieve more "likes". Instead of a moment-to-moment transparent view, we began to receive the edited docudrama. Popularity in the Facebook schoolyard could be measured in thumbs-ups — or more recently, the more difficult-to-value number of "subscribers." For many hapless users, their own lives began to appear dull, or worse still, not like worthy, when stacked against the smart, glamorous and Instagram-filtered vacations of friends and colleagues. All of life's insecurities, long ago tucked safely away after years of wisdom or expensive therapy, welled right back up again with each page refresh.

In short, social media soon became more about being media savvy, and less about being social. Hollywood caught on quickly. Celebrities and their handlers began to use social media to open carefully constructed windows into their lives — enough to titillate but not really enlighten. Fans followed, hoping for bits of insight and, if lucky, the occasional hastily tweeted, then suddenly retracted, outburst.



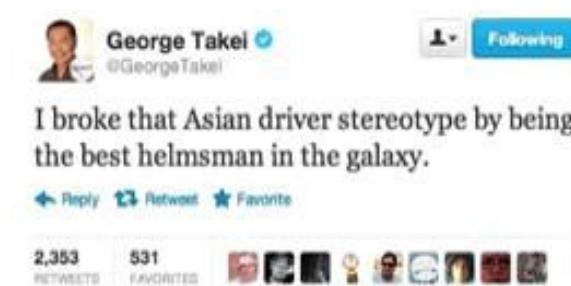
But this was just a commercial reflection of a growing social phenomenon. Indeed, when you think about it, on a broader level each of us now makes the decisions of a celebrity. With each post or tweet, we choose what to keep private and what to make public, what face to show the world and what to keep buried. It is a kind of deception, and we have become reality stars, every one of us.

Speaking from personal experience, having *any* social media presence followed by thousands even millions of people is not for the faint of heart; one drunken tweet or post, and the gig is up. I've unintentionally shared pictures meant for a select group of friends that, to my horror, went out to tens of thousands of fans before I could delete them. Oh myyy, indeed.

Facebook wised up and started permitting “filters” — privacy settings that one had to master like a second language. Friends and family were divided into those who could know everything, some things, or almost nothing. Each post thereafter carried with it a critical decision: Make public (and get the most attention), or limit severely (and save your dignity). There are many who have simply refused to apply such filters and are living their lives out publicly and unabashedly — what I call the “Lindsay Lohan Effect.” We love these people. We really do.

Apart from the privacy concerns, I decided a while back that my life simply wasn't interesting enough on a day-to-day level to update others in real time. No one would really care to know what I ate for breakfast or which movie I went to see — and if they did, I really didn't want them commenting about it. Instead, I set out simply to share with my fans many of the funny or inspiring things I came across. What I didn't realize at the time was that, by sharing these posts, I could grow a whole community that didn't exist before.

It started, of course, with science fiction fans, especially long-time Trekkies who were happy to experience some kind of regular contact with Mr. Sulu. I owe my career to these fans, and I have never understood actors who don't take the time to acknowledge and thank them. On Twitter and Facebook I soon learned I could go one step further and actually interact with fans everyday. One of my earlier posts on Twitter garnered much attention and basically launched my online journey:



Fans seemed genuinely surprised and delighted that a man of my, let's say, “maturity” would go and get himself a Twitter account and start putting it out there. I recall gaining thousands of fans in a single day and being at the top of the Twitter homepage for a few short but glorious hours. And I must say for the first month it was all pretty much fun and games, with humorous posts about current events and my own odd take on them. That all changed one fateful day in March of 2011, when I was awakened by a friend who alerted me to the tragedy of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami. That was the first time I learned the true value and power of the social network: an open channel of communication that can not only entertain but also unite us in a common cause, from responding to a disaster to — as the Arab Spring showed us — toppling a government.

That morning, as I witnessed the extent of the devastation in Japan, I put out the following tweet in the hopes of raising money for disaster relief:



George Takei
@GeorgeTakei



Following

Today we are all Japanese. Give \$10 to help.
Text REDCROSS to 90999, or click
<http://ow.ly/4ctzx> Pls RT!

← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite

That simple plea, sent out to my modest fan-base of some 30,000 mostly *Star Trek* followers, echoed and reverberated beyond all expectation. Celebrities took up the call, retweeting it to their fans and thus around the world in a matter of minutes. I don't know how many people actually texted to donate, but I did hear that individual donations topped over \$7 million in the first few days. And even more unexpectedly, my own Twitter account became a type of Ground Zero for information, where I could retweet information about missing persons, the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima reactor, and the grim casualty counts from outlying areas.

I was new to Twitter, so it came as a surprise that news outlets were following my tweets. CNN called that next day, asking for an interview. As the most prominent Japanese American actor and activist out there on the social media — not a hard spot to occupy, admittedly — it suddenly fell to me to spearhead the social media campaign. I followed up the Twitter work with a YouTube video, hastily assembled by my team of producers at my show *Allegiance* (who were kind enough to lend the logistical support — you'll hear a lot about them in this book, for without them I don't know how I have put much of my media together). The video took some of the most compelling pictures of the disaster, including amazing rescue and recovery efforts and examples of the selfless and stoic response of the Japanese people, and coupled them with another plea for assistance. Over 100,000 people watched that video within the first day of its release.

The disaster relief campaign taught me an early lesson in the power of social media, one that I have carried with me since. With just a few thousand fans, amplified by the power of Twitter, I was able to make a real difference in the lives of millions, as well as alert traditional media to our efforts. I soon thought to myself, "If I can make such an impact with just a few thousand fans, why not reach out and build a larger platform?" There was much work to be done, and causes near and dear to my heart that I wanted to speak out on. The question of same-sex marriage, for example, was reaching critical crossroads. I also wanted to fulfill what I consider one of my life's missions: to ensure that the history and lessons of the Japanese American internment never be forgotten.

Fundamentally, I wanted to build a community that could laugh, share and discuss the pressing matters of society. Already on my Facebook page, fans were beginning to post very funny science- and science fiction-related images, called "memes" by the digerati. In the early days of my Facebook page, I would receive a dozen or so wall posts a day and sift through them, downloading the images I found particularly funny or inspiring. I never really knew at the time whether I would ever use them, but I just enjoyed keeping them and laughing over them with Brad later (I've included many examples of these memes in this book, some of which I've had to revise or recreate because of a little thing called copyright).

But like my experience with the tsunami and Twitter, I soon found myself acting as a central gathering spot — a "node" if you will — for sharing some of the Internet's funniest memes. I say this knowing full well that I did not create any of these images; they were all sent to me by others. But there is real value in sharing — and real rewards. The number of fans on my Facebook page leapt from 25,000 to over 100,000 in a matter of days as word spread that Sulu had started a page and had "some pretty funny shit" on it, as many a fan wrote on my wall.

I must admit, at first I was quite taken aback by the number of shares and likes on each post, and I had to limit myself to just a few a day so as not to get too sucked in. It also took me months to understand what all the fuss and appeal was about. Fans had to explain it to me: Having Sulu as a Facebook “friend” was like “having a favorite gay uncle” — one with a somewhat naughty sense of humor.

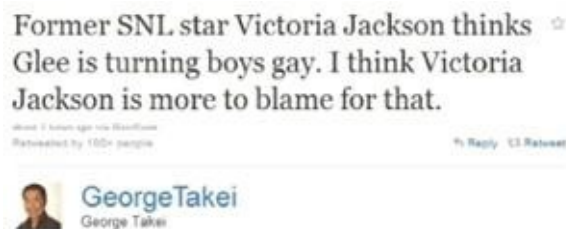
“Okay, I get that,” I said. And with that, my Internet career was born.

Twitter Sniping

When I first began sharing online, I spent a great deal of time on Twitter. I had no idea what I was doing, let alone whether anyone would want to read anything I tweeted. I hoped to say something that might rise above the fray, and do it in 140 characters or less. And I was delighted when fans responded, welcoming me to the Twitterverse. I even made sure each new follower received a thank you from me (eventually I had to discontinue this). I made a conscious decision, however, not to “follow” each fan who gave me a follow, as I knew it would quickly become impossible to read through my Twitter stream each day. I hoped fans would understand.

Truth be told, I wasn’t even quite sure what Twitter was for, or what good it would do anyone other than to read breaking news. But as the Tsunami relief efforts taught me, social media can be a powerful force for change. And so, with my daily tweet, I not only hoped to share funny advice and anecdotes, but to effect some kind of change.

One opportunity arose unexpectedly, when I suddenly found myself in a unique position to respond to the world’s homophobes with my own brand of humor. Victoria Jackson, a comedienne who had a stint on *Saturday Night Live* many years ago, was the first I felt compelled to answer. She had gone on a very public rant about how the show *Glee* was supposedly turning boys gay, presumably because it is filled with musical theater moments. At first, I thought she must be joking or had lost her marbles. Anyone these days knows that you don’t “turn” someone gay, nor can you “convert” them through “therapy”, bringing them squealing back from the Great Pink Path. Indeed, I’m pleased that a recent California law expressly rejects and outlaws such practices. Even more ludicrous is the idea that a few song and dance numbers on a FOX television show might spread The Gay. But Ms. Jackson continued her shrill tirade, and so out of “exasperation,” I tweeted this:



Now, normally I don’t care to make fun of someone’s physical appearance unless it’s my husband’s (he once was a svelte marathon runner; now I just tell him there’s more of him to love). But you must admit, Ms. Jackson was asking for this kind of response. If she really believes exposure to some external influence can turn young boys gay, surely the sight of her in all her present corpulence would have a greater gay-ifying effect.

The “comedian” Tracy Morgan was another real piece of work. He is filled with such hatred toward LGBT people that, during one routine, he actually declared that he would kill his own son if he found out he were gay. I was shocked to hear such a horrifying threat, particularly from someone in the entertainment field who works daily with gay people and LGBT allies such as the remarkable Tina Fey, who — to her great credit — took Morgan to task for his outburst. This time news outlets began contacting me for a response. My tweet followed quickly after:



In stand-up rant, Tracy Morgan threatened to kill his son if he were gay. I suspect his dad is next for naming him "Tracy."

Now, I didn't know at the time that Tracy's father was already dead, or I would have tempered that a bit. That was an "oops." But my objective was to answer hatred with humor, to "defang the snake," as it were. I could spend hours arguing about how violence, or even the threat of violence against LGBT people is a societal plague. I could expound at length on how bullying and homophobia account for up to one-third of all teen suicides. I could ask someone like Tracy directly if he condoned violence against minorities, or how he would feel if someone threatened to kill his son if he were black, as I presume he would be. But that's really someone else's job. My own feeling is that laughter, irony, and ridicule are the best responses to this type of behavior. Giving someone like Tracy any more stage time for his weird, sad rant would solve nothing.

Another person for whom I share little love is former Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger. This movie actor-cum-politician ran on a platform of liberal social policy and fiscal conservatism, and I believed in my heart that he would stand by his principles on the question of same-sex marriage. After many years, the California Legislature finally passed a marriage bill that would allow my then-partner of nearly 20 years Brad and me to be married and enjoy the same rights and privileges afforded to heterosexual couples in the Golden State. I thought to myself, "This is going to happen. The Governor said he supports equality, and we are finally going to have it."

Imagine my surprise and indignation when The Governor instead vetoed the legislation, saying among other things, that this was a matter for the courts to decide, not our elected representatives. Of course, when courts overturn same-sex marriage bans, you'll hear the same people complaining that the courts are legislating from the bench; they'll simply blame whichever branch of government sided with LGBT rights at the time. Schwarzenegger's act of vetoing the bill was the heat that finally got me steamed enough to take action. I'm speaking specifically about the step of coming out publicly to the press. I had been "out" for some time among family and friends, but had never taken the public step of alerting the press. And as an actor, you're not really out until you're out to the press, believe me.

As the world now knows, for Arnold Schwarzenegger to take any position with respect to family values, marriage or morality is truly the height of irony. So when his own scandal broke, I saw no reason to hold back. I tweeted this, with a geeky Sci-fi reference thrown in for good measure:



This turned out to be one of my most popular tweets. But I only learned this after the Webmaster for *Allegiance* pointed me to a site that actually tracks Twitter virality. I had no idea anyone even cared enough to monitor such things.

Another popular tweet played upon the hypocrisy of some of the rants of the Fundamentalists

They frequently cite The Old Testament as proof not only that God is on their side, but that He really doesn't like gay people. The truth is, you can find almost anything in the Bible to latch onto if you are really determined. The prohibitions in the Old Testament are not only archaic, but wide reaching. So after hearing yet another righteous citation to restrictions thousands of years past their usefulness, I tweeted this:



It wasn't really true. I don't care for polyester. But the tweet resonated, I believe, not only because it pointed out an obvious double standard, but also because there's something funny about imagining a senior citizen violating Leviticus.

We don't have that many elderly spokespersons of comedy these days. We once had the great George Burns, and Bob Hope, and Johnny Carson. Today, of course, we have Betty White, who recently turned 90. I've learned that when you get to be a certain age, you can get away with saying a lot of things, some of which wouldn't even be remotely funny if someone forty years younger said them. *The Golden Girls* ran for years off the same theory and basically used the same four jokes for seven marvelous seasons. I've recently suggested that Betty and I should do a TV series about two seniors living together in an unlikely pairing of a widow and a naughty gay best buddy. We could call it *Friends with Government Benefits*.

In my tweets, I also try to stay current, not only with news, but with pop culture. I read the Hollywood press, and I see every film up for an Academy Award for Best Picture (this is actually my responsibility, as I'm a voting member of the Academy). I don't generally listen to rock music. But when I do, I believe some classics should remain undisturbed.



It's hard to believe, but Kurt Cobain died more than 18 years ago, back in 1994. Miley Cyrus was only 1½ years old when he passed. For some reason, while the 1990s seemed to be a huge decade of change and progress, the years after 2000 all blend together.



Here's another thing about tweets: You never know if something is going to get "retweeted" much, which is problematic because retweets are what draw fans to my account. Unlike more prolific tweeters, I tried to limit my tweets to one a day and to make them count. For a time, I actually made

the effort to track how well they were received, if only to gauge whether they had any resonance with my followers. A pattern soon emerged. A tweet would receive high traction if it was among the first commentaries on breaking news. That traction would be increased greatly if it were funny, particularly if it made a pop cultural reference that had to be inferred. This latter point was important: I wanted to build a following of engaged thinkers, not merely fans. I had no need or patience for those who cared only about my work on TV or film. For me, social media needed to be an interactive, not reactive endeavor. And a retweet had to say implicitly, “I get this joke and approve.”

Once a tweet enters the Twitterstream, however, there’s no real way to build much of a discussion around it. Sure, there are hashtags to provide a mechanism to enable me to go back and read what others had tweeted on the same topic, but I found the whole thing rather cumbersome. I admittedly took me a while even to figure out what the hashtag “#FF @georgetakei” meant. Where my mind first went with that isn’t fit for print; let’s just say I thought it was pronounced “Pound-F-George Takei.”

A tweet also lives on forever once it’s out, even if you delete it from your homepage. And there are some tweets that I’ve come to regret, even if they were funny at the time. For example, when Donald Trump was running for President, I was rather unimpressed with his “birther” campaign against Obama. It seemed to drag us into a non-issue over and over again.

So when his campaign finally ran out of steam, I was both relieved and amused, tweeting this:



I’ve had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Trump personally and even going on his show, *Celebrity Apprentice*, on which I only lasted three weeks. I’m told that my “exit” from the show was gracious, which I’m relieved to hear since it was an extremely frustrating loss that did not seem deserved at the time. While Mr. Trump and I disagree on many matters, including the question of marriage equality, I found him quite willing to listen to the other side. I’ve even invited him to sit down with me over lunch at Jean-Georges in Trump International Hotel Central Park to hear me out on the question, an invitation he’s accepted in principle, but we haven’t yet had the opportunity to make happen. So I wouldn’t describe him as a “douchebag” today, even after his awkward “October ’12 Surprise” that fizzled like the career of an *American Idol* winner. This goes to show even my mind can be changed after seven and a half decades of living.

Some of the better times I spent on Twitter involved following the occasional Twitter feud (or, in the case of the dispute between fans of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, the occasional Twitter peace — more on that later). I even had my own friendly feud with the comedian Gilbert Gottfried, whose name I always seem to misspell. Gottfried roasted me at the Friars Club and I’ve worked with him on film before, including voicing Disney animations together, so let me first assure readers that we are on friendly terms. That didn’t stop Gottfried from launching into me one fateful week.

It was shortly after the Japanese Tsunami in 2011, and Gottfried had just been summarily fired from his job voicing the Aflac duck on account of his tasteless humor aimed at victims of the disaster. As one of the international spokesmen for disaster relief, and as a member of the Twitterati with a growing and active following, I was a natural target for Gilbert’s ribbing, particularly after I tagged

him in a post but once again misspelled his name. He began posting things from his highly active Twitter account hoping to get my attention. Here is a quick sample of some of his tweets:

“@GeorgeTakei Hey #Queer, learn to spell my name.”

When I demurred, he upped the ante:

“Tracy Morgan is in trouble with the gays, me with the Japanese. Whatever you do, don’t make any jokes about @GeorgeTakei!!!”

“@GeorgeTakei Hey George, I heard when Star Trek was on, the pay was really low, but you received a lot in the back-end.”

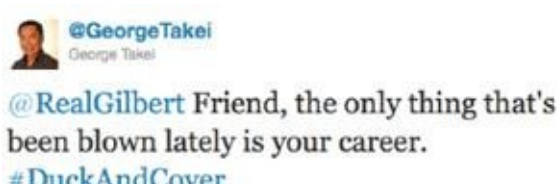
I tried to deflect the attack, tweeting that unfortunately I don’t speak Chihuahua. But that only seemed to inflame him further:

“Hey @Georgetakei, That comment was hard to swallow. But I guess you’ve never had the problem.”

My followers started to point out on chat boards that Godtfreid was gunning for me, and try as I might to ignore the barrage, his Twitter guns kept firing. Then came this tweet:



Le sigh. I realized that “shields” were not enough to dissuade Godfreet; I needed to bring out my own Twitter torpedoes:



For this exchange, and others, BuzzFeed unexpectedly awarded me with the best Twitter streamer award in 2011, the above exchange being their #1 pick. Oh my, my, my. But for me, the real future of social media clearly wasn’t in a top-down, mostly text-based world of truncated messaging. Twitter was great for receiving instant news, posting quick updates and links, and growing a basic following. But answering fans became far too demanding, and going through my “interactions” and “mentions” on a daily basis was proving too much of a time sink.

And so, perhaps to the dismay of my avid Twitter followers, I backed off. By October of 2011, I had begun to focus on my Facebook page and was gaining much broader traction, and the ability to share images and talk about them collectively as a community was simply too enticing. My heavy Twitter days were more or less done — you might even say my Twitter campaign was in full retreat.

Waka Waka Into Mordor

ONE DOES NOT SIMPLY WAKA WAKA INTO MORDOR (FOZZY BEAR)

During my first few months of Facebooking, I discovered that my page had fostered a collective nostalgia for specific cultural icons. These started, unsurprisingly, within the realm of science fiction and fantasy. They commonly included a pointy-eared Vulcan from a certain groundbreaking 1960s television show.

Just as often, though, I found myself sharing images of a diminutive, ancient, green and disarmingly wise Jedi Master who speaks in flip-side down English. Or, if feeling more sinister, I'd post pictures of his black-cloaked, dark-sided, heavy-breathing nemesis. As an aside, I initially received from *Star Trek* fans considerable "push-back," or at least many raised Spock brows, when I began sharing images of Yoda and Darth Vader. To the purists, this bordered on sacrilege.. But as I like to remind fans, I was the only actor to work within both franchises, having also voiced the part of Lok Durd from the animated show *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*.

It was the virality of these early posts, shared by thousands of fans without any prodding from me, that got me thinking. Why *do* we love Spock, Yoda and Darth Vader so much? And what is it about characters like these that causes fans to click "like" and "share" so readily?

One thing was clear: Cultural icons help people define who they are today because they shape who they were as children. We all "like" Yoda because we all loved *The Empire Strikes Back* (I probably watched it many times, and can recite our favorite lines. Indeed, we all can quote Yoda, and we all have tried out our best impression of him.

When someone posts a meme of Yoda, many immediately share it, not just because they think it is funny (though it usually is — it's hard to go wrong with the Master), but because it says something about the sharer. It's shorthand for saying, "This little guy made a huge impact on me, not sure what it is, but for certain a huge impact. Did it make one on you, too? I'm clicking 'share' to affirm something you may not know about me. I 'like' Yoda."

And isn't that what sharing on Facebook is all about? It's not simply that the sharer wants you to snortle or "LOL" as it were. That's part of it, but not the core. At its core is a statement about one's belief system, one that includes the wisdom of Yoda.



Other eminently shareable icons included beloved Tolkien characters, particularly Gandalf (played by the inimitable Sir Ian McKellan). Gandalf, like Yoda, is somehow always above reproach and unflinchingly epic.



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Like Yoda, Gandalf has his darker counterpart. Gollum is a fan favorite because he is a fallen figure who could reform with the right guidance. It doesn't hurt that his every meme is invariably red in his distinctive, blood-curdling rasp. I recall with fondness one popular meme:



Then there's also Batman, who seems to have survived both Adam West and Christian Bale, but whose questionable relationship to the Boy Wonder left plenty of room for hilarious homoerotic undertones. But seriously, there is something about the brooding, misunderstood and "chaotic-good" nature of this superhero that touches all of our hearts.

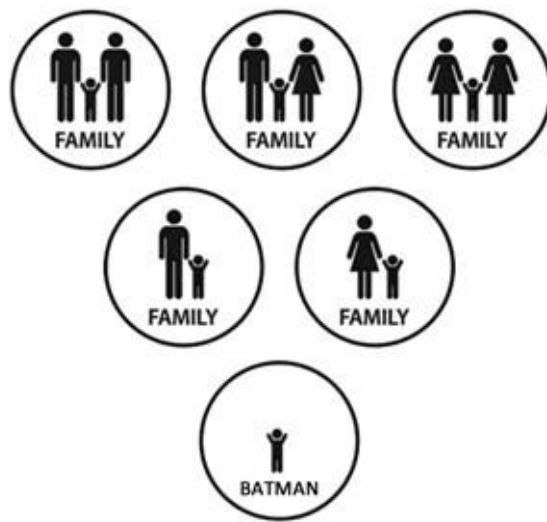


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Although my “most-shared” posts began with sci-fi and fantasy, I found that fans universal longed for other things. For some reason, the Muppets — the classic, ragtag set of misbegotten optimists — also made their way commonly into pics shared on my wall. Perhaps it’s the simple wonder of a non-traditional, cross-species marriage between a frog and a pig that never fails to provoke a smile. I was particularly delighted to see Jim Henson’s estate pull its advertisements with “Chick-fil-A” after that company’s CEO and management came out strongly against same-sex marriage. Often when I’m stuck wondering about what I should post, I come back to these furry, fluffed, and fisted fellows. The latter adjective reminds me of a cartoon, which I can’t reprint here depicting Kermit about to receive his X-ray results. The X-ray shows a skeletal arm deep inside Kermit’s innards, the doctor saying, “What I’m about to tell you may come as a shock...”

For my fans born in the 1960s, Spock, Kermit, and Batman were icons of their early childhood that, to the delight of us all, maintain continued cultural relevance today. Indeed, *Star Trek* movies still roll out to entertain and inspire whole new audiences, even if the cast comprises a whole set of new, fresh faces. Kermit and Miss Piggy have made a comeback, moving back into their original stage in Hollywood. And meanwhile, after many franchises, *The Dark Knight* still rises in theaters.

I cannot mention the last fact without feeling profound sadness and loss for those killed by a lone, deranged gunman in Colorado while gathered for the midnight premiere showing of that film. I was so struck by the senselessness of it that I was compelled to put out a simple message that day:

MANY VICTIMS OF TODAY'S TRAGEDY WERE FANS OF SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY. THEY STOOD IN LINE TO BE THE FIRST TO SEE, TO BE INSPIRED, AND TO ESCAPE. AS A COMMUNITY OF DREAMERS, WE MOURN THIS TERRIBLE TRAGEDY AND THIS SENSELESS TAKING OF INNOCENT LIVES. (GEORGE TAKEI)

Beyond well-known characters, like the Muppets or Batman, many fans share a love for other long-lost symbols of an “America-that-once-was.” These fans were children when cassette tapes were wound by hand, when No. 2 pencils, when “film” was held in black plastic cases resembling Tupperware, and when young artists drew cityscapes using control knobs on a red television-like screen filled with magnet powder. They grew up knowing what this meant when you came into the classroom in the morning:



ADMIT IT:

NOTHING MADE YOU HAPPIER
THAN WALKING INTO CLASS AS
A KID AND SEEING
THIS!

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In fairness, when I was growing up, we didn't even have VCRs or Movie Day at school, but Generation X and the Baby Boomers did. I am mindful of the generational divide, and I sometimes even test it — as when I post lyrics side by side from today versus the 1970s:



Young people are quick to jump to the defense of the music of these times, but a part of me wonders whether music has somehow peaked. Listening to Lady Gaga today, it sounds an awful lot like Madge in the 1990s. Boy bands are pretty much still boy bands. The only new developments seem to be the incorporation of rap moments in otherwise melodic pop tunes and the prevalence of auto-tune, neither of which appear to have advanced the art form appreciably.

But I digress. My Facebook page has become a sort of cultural barometer that I find truly fascinating. Nothing much happens by the way of pop culture without at least some fan posting about it on my wall. So even at the age of 75, I feel more or less current in today's goings-on. Some may find it surprising that my fan base, according to the statistics posted on Facebook, is not made up mostly of aging Trekkies over the age of 50. To the contrary, the largest demographic on my page is males between the age of 25 and 34 (what I call the Comedy Central crowd — they love anything I post about *South Park* or *Family Guy*), followed closely by females in the same age bracket. I'm not exactly sure when this shift occurred, but it delights me to know that, though I am separated in age by some forty or fifty years from most of my fans, they have welcomed me into their lives. As my fan base tilts ever younger, fewer and fewer fans will know me merely as “that guy who played Sulu.”

Perhaps my page carries some favor because I often explore the common cultural ground beneath us. Take, for instance, the world's nearly unanimous love for Harry Potter. The Baby Boomers, now mostly in their 60s, are beginning to read these stories aloud to their grandchildren. At the same time, young people are quick to embrace it as their own epic saga. Who among us hasn't dreamed of waking up to find that we are destined for more than mere Mugglehood? The children in these stories awaken universal desires in us: the quest for greatness, the pull of companionship and love, a sense of clarity in our moral choices, an abiding belief in the magical and wondrous, and the ability to talk to snakes.

Compare *that* to the banal, static and self-absorbed story that is *Twilight*. Now, it's no secret that I am not a lover of this series. I made this clear in my call for the Star Alliance, which I'll cover in my next chapter. You see, cultural icons stand the test of time because they speak to our deepest convictions and ignite our dreams. There is more story in a minor character like Boba Fett than the

is in all the clutter of various vampires in the *Twilight* franchise.

If it is our collective adoration for these characters that brings us together, then I am more than happy to be the purveyor of such images on a daily basis. Like holiday carols, Rubik's cubes, and reruns of *The Brady Bunch*, they remind us all that we were shaped by common cultural experiences that carried with them a common guiding set of values. While critics often wring their hands over the presumed superficiality of these icons and values, particularly given the poverty and afflictions of most of the rest of the world, they fail to offer up a workable alternative. If leadership requires a fire and a sense of purpose and imagination, it also demands a profound connection to the society to be led. Like it or not, this is our culture, and we should embrace and celebrate it, even while we strive to refine and shape it.

Meanwhile, I'm going to go watch some *Muppet Show* reruns and work on my best Yoda.

The Star Alliance

About a year ago, I received a tweet from a fan informing me that the *Chicago Sun Times* film critic, Roger Ebert, had called upon me to broker a peace. It was intriguing, to say the least. Mr. Ebert had been following a growing online feud between two of sci-fi's heavyweights — Carrie Fisher and William Shatner (no pun intended, Bill).

Bill had begun the spat by ridiculing the *Star Wars* franchise during an interview. He claimed that *Star Wars* was less original than *Star Trek*, and that *Trek* had a leg up over *Wars* when it came to character development and story line. “*Star Trek* had relationships and conflict among the characters, relationships, and stories that involved humanity and philosophical questions. *Star Wars* was special effects,” he stated. “*Star Wars* was derivative of us by - what, 10, 15, 20 years?” He then took the character of Princess Leia on directly: “As beautiful as she was, and as wonderful an actress as she is, (she) can't compare to the marvelous heroines we had on *Star Trek*.”



Now, Bill likes to stir the pot, particularly if he has a new show coming out, and he does not do things without knowing the consequences. You can't fire a photon torpedo across the bow of an Imperial Destroyer without some kind of response. It wasn't long before Carrie Fisher hit back with her own interview, “*Star Wars* was soooooo much better than *Star Trek*,” she said. She compared Klingon to a laundry detergent (I confess, I chuckled when I heard this), and noted that the original series appeared to lack any kind of budget for special effects. To add some personal insult to injury, she mocked Bill's weight gain since retiring as Captain of the *Enterprise*, then cheekily added that her own “space buns” were superior to Spock's ears.



The Shat then fired back, in yet another video, claiming he could in fact still fit in his uniform with a bit of pushing on the stretch material, but that he doubted Fisher could still fit into her bikini worn in the third movie. Yes, it had turned quite personal.

Of course, it was all in good fun, but beneath it all a nagging question remained: Was Bill correct that *Star Wars*' use of special effects detracted from the story and characters? Was Ms. Fisher far off the mark in criticizing the admittedly shaky effects of the original series?

It didn't take long for the Internet to grow abuzz, with sci-fi fans rushing to the defense of the

favored “Star” series. While *Star Trek* had lasted through the ages, *Star Wars* concededly had gained far greater pop culture penetration. Geeks everywhere were taking sides, and a rupture in the sci-fi continuum seemed possible. So when Roger Ebert’s blog covered the feud, he wondered aloud whether a peace could be made between the two warring sides: “One can only hope George Takei (*Star Trek* Lt. Sulu) can be brought in to broker a peace settlement before blood is shed.”

I’m not exactly sure why Ebert chose to ask for my assistance. Did he know that I had worked on *Star Wars* as well as *Star Trek* and thus stood in some unique position? Did he pick me because I had already successfully begun an online presence, and had a few viral videos under my belt? Or was there something authoritative about my delivery that he believed could quiet the growing storm?

I jest of course. I happily accepted the challenge, and I did not take this assignment lightly. I took them both to shut their wormholes, before images like this began to appear:



Indeed, a fracture between the two fan bases of the two titans of science fiction threatened to pull our collective attentions away at a time when focus, unity and singularity of purpose was much needed.

I was speaking, of course, about the common threat that was *Twilight*.

In my video calling for the Star Alliance against *Twilight*, I went into some of the basic reasons why that movie series (I confess, I have not read the books — and if they are anything like the film, I don’t care to) could poison an entire generation’s mindset toward science fiction. For me, both *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* represent the expansion of human imagination, creativity, and curiosity. In the best of science fiction, epic battles rage between forces of good and evil, and the fate of the universe often hangs in the balance. Noble and stirring characters inhabit the big screen, challenging us to become heroes, to rise to our fullest potential, and to vanquish our enemies utterly. Great lessons are taught and absorbed by, young minds and hearts.

In *Twilight*, not so. Unlike the great vampires of the Anne Rice series, *The Lost Boys* movie or more recently, *True Blood*, there is nothing “bad ass” in the least about the *Twilight* bloodsuckers. In that simpering world, centuries-old vampires mope over 17-year olds, attend high school, and sparkle in the sunlight. The main, driving question throughout the first of the three films was not a struggle for domination, a gripping test of the limits of camaraderie, or even a quest for something long since thought unattainable. No, *Twilight* asked the same burning question so many *Tiger Beat* feature demanded of their readers: “Does my boyfriend like me?”

Okay, okay. We had a great deal of fun at the expense of poor *Twilight*, and fan memes dutifully flooded my page. My favorites depicted various vampire hunters — Buffy, Blade, Abraham Lincoln — in hot pursuit of sparkly, pale Edward. Other fans chimed in with humor about the banality of the

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