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Kurt Vonnegut

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"Vonnegut" redirects here. For other persons with the surname, see Vonnegut (surname).

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (/ˈvɒnnɪlət/; November 11, 1922 – April 11, 2007) was an American writer.^[1] His works such as *Cat's Cradle* (1963), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), and *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) blend satire, gallows humor, and science fiction. As a citizen he was a lifelong supporter of the American Civil Liberties Union and a critical pacifist intellectual.^[2] He was known for his humanist beliefs and was honorary president of the American Humanist Association.^[3]

The *New York Times* headline at the time of Vonnegut's passing called Vonnegut "the counterculture's novelist."^{[4][5]}

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Life [edit]

Early years [edit]

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, to third-generation German-American parents Kurt Vonnegut, Sr., and Edith (Lieber) Vonnegut.^[6] Both his father and his grandfather Bernard Vonnegut attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and were architects in the Indianapolis firm of Vonnegut & Bohn. His great-grandfather, Clemens Vonnegut, Sr., was the founder of the Vonnegut Hardware Company, an Indianapolis firm.^[7] Vonnegut had an older brother, Bernard and a sister, Alice.^[8] Vonnegut graduated from Shortridge High School in Indianapolis in May 1940 and went to Cornell University that fall. Though majoring in chemistry, he was Assistant Managing Editor and Associate Editor of *The Cornell Daily Sun*.^[9] He was a member of the Delta Upsilon Fraternity, as was his father. While at Cornell, Vonnegut enlisted in the United States Army.^[10] The Army transferred him to the Carnegie Institute of Technology and finally the University of Tennessee to study mechanical engineering.^[1]

On Mother's Day 1944, while on leave during World War II, he discovered that his mother had committed suicide with sleeping pills.^[11]

World War II [edit]

Reassigned to a combat unit due to the manpower needs of the Allied invasion of France, Vonnegut was captured while a private with the 423rd Infantry Regiment, 106th Infantry Division during the Battle of the Bulge. On December 19, 1944, the 106th Division was cut off from the rest of Courtney Hodges's First Army. "The other American divisions on our flanks managed to pull out; we were obliged to stay and fight. Bayonets aren't much good against tanks".^[12] Imprisoned in Dresden, he was chosen as a leader of the POWs because he spoke some German. After telling some German guards "what [he] was going to do to them when the Russians came", he was beaten and had his position as leader revoked.^[13] He witnessed the Allied firebombing of Dresden in February 1945, which destroyed most of the historic city.^[14]

Vonnegut was part of a group of American prisoners of war who survived the

Kurt Vonnegut



U.S. Army official portrait of Kurt Vonnegut, c. early 1940s

Born	Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. <div>November 11, 1922</div> Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.
Died	April 11, 2007 (aged 84)
	New York City, New York, U.S.
Occupation	Novelist, essayist
Nationality	American
Alma mater	Shortridge High School Cornell University Carnegie Institute of Technology University of Tennessee University of Chicago (MA.)
Period	1949–2007
Genres	Satire Gallows humor Science fiction
Notable work(s)	<i>Cat's Cradle</i> <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> <i>Breakfast of Champions</i>
Spouse(s)	Jane Marie Cox Jill Krementz
Children	Mark Vonnegut Edith Vonnegut Nannette Vonnegut James Adams (adopted) Steven Adams (adopted) Kurt Adams (adopted) Lily (adopted)
Relative(s)	Kurt Vonnegut, Sr. (father) Clemens Vonnegut, Sr. Bernard Vonnegut, Sr. Bernard Vonnegut
	Military career
Allegiance	 United States
Service/branch	 United States Army
Rank	Private
Unit	423rd Infantry Regiment, 106th Infantry Division
Battles/wars	World War II <ul style="list-style-type: none">Battle of the Bulge
Awards	Purple Heart

Sámegiella
Simple English
Slovenčina
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Српски / srpski
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srpskohrvatski
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Vonnegut was part of the group of American prisoners of war who were held in a bombing in an underground slaughterhouse meat locker used as an ad hoc detention facility. The German guards called the building *Schlachthof Fünf* ("Slaughterhouse Five"), and the POWs adopted that name. Vonnegut said that the aftermath of the attack on the defenseless city was "utter destruction" and "carnage unfathomable". The experience was the inspiration for his famous novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and is a central theme in at least six of his other books. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* he recalls that the ruins of the city looked like the surface of the moon. He said the German guards put the surviving POWs to work, breaking into basements and bomb shelters to gather bodies for mass burial, while German civilians cursed and threw rocks at them.^[13] Vonnegut remarked, "There were too many corpses to bury. So instead the Germans sent in troops with flamethrowers. All these civilians' remains were burned to ashes."^[15]

Vonnegut was liberated by **Red Army** soldiers in May 1945 at the Saxony–Czechoslovakian border.^[13] On his return to America, he was awarded a **Purple Heart** for what he called a "ludicrously negligible wound,"^{[16][17]} later writing facetiously in *Timequake* that he was given the decoration after suffering a case of "frostbite".^[18] Vonnegut's experience as a soldier and **prisoner of war** had a profound influence on his later work.

Post-war career [edit]

After the war, Vonnegut attended the **University of Chicago** as a graduate student in **anthropology** and also worked at the **City News Bureau of Chicago**. He described his work there in the late 1940s in terms that could have been used by almost any other City Press reporter of any era: "Well, the Chicago City News Bureau was a tripwire for all the newspapers in town when I was there, and there were five papers, I think. We were out all the time around the clock and every time we came across a really juicy murder or scandal or whatever, they'd send the big time reporters and photographers, otherwise they'd run our stories. So that's what I was doing, and I was going to university at the same time."^[19] Vonnegut admitted that he was a poor anthropology student, with one professor remarking that some of the students were going to be professional anthropologists and he was not one of them.^[citation needed] According to Vonnegut in *Bagombo Snuff Box*, the university rejected his first thesis on the necessity of accounting for the similarities between **Cubist** painters and the leaders of late 19th Century **Native American** uprisings, saying it was "unprofessional."

He left Chicago to work in **Schenectady**, New York, in public relations for **General Electric**, where his brother Bernard worked in the research department. Vonnegut was a **technical writer**, but was also known for writing well past his typical hours while working. While in Schenectady, Vonnegut lived in the tiny hamlet of **Alplaus**, located within the town of Glenville, just across the Mohawk River from the city of Schenectady. Vonnegut rented an upstairs apartment located along Alplaus Creek across the street from the Alplaus Volunteer Fire Department, where he was an active Volunteer Fire-Fighter for a few years. To this day, the apartment where Vonnegut lived for a brief time still has a desk at which he wrote many of his short stories; Vonnegut carved his name on its underside. The University of Chicago later accepted his novel *Cat's Cradle* as his thesis, citing its anthropological content, and awarded him the M.A. degree in 1971.^{[20][21]}

In the mid-1950s, Vonnegut worked very briefly for *Sports Illustrated* magazine, where he was assigned to write a piece on a racehorse that had jumped a fence and attempted to run away. After staring at the blank piece of paper on his typewriter all morning, he typed, "The horse jumped over the fucking fence," and left.^[22] On the verge of abandoning writing, Vonnegut was offered a teaching job at the **University of Iowa Writers' Workshop**. While he was there, *Cat's Cradle* became a best-seller, and he began *Slaughterhouse-Five*, now considered by some to be one of the best American novels of the 20th century, appearing on the 100 best lists of *Time* magazine^[23] and the Modern Library.^[24]

Early in his adult life he moved to **Barnstable, Massachusetts**, a town on **Cape Cod**^[25] where, in 1957, he established one of the first **Saab** dealerships in the U.S. The business failed within a year.^{[26][27]}

Personal life [edit]

The author's name appears in print as "Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.," throughout the first half of his published writing career; beginning with the 1976 publication of *Slapstick*, he dropped the "Jr." and was simply billed as Kurt Vonnegut. His older brother, **Bernard Vonnegut**, was an atmospheric scientist at the **University at Albany**, who discovered that **silver iodide** could be used for **cloud seeding**, the process of artificially stimulating precipitation.^[28]

After returning from World War II, Kurt Vonnegut married his childhood sweetheart, Jane Marie Cox, writing about their courtship in several of his short stories. In the 1960s they lived in Barnstable, Massachusetts, where for a while Vonnegut worked at a Saab dealership. The couple separated in 1970; that same year, Vonnegut began living with the woman who would later become his second wife, photographer **Jill Krentz**,^[1] although he did not divorce Cox until 1979. Krentz and Vonnegut were married after the divorce from Cox was finalized.

He raised seven children: three from his first marriage; three of his sister Alice's four children, adopted by Vonnegut after her death from cancer;^[29] and a seventh, Lily, adopted with Krentz. His son, **Mark Vonnegut**, a pediatrician, has written two books: one about his experiences in the late 1960s and his major **psychotic** breakdown and recovery; the other includes anecdotes of growing up when his father was a struggling writer, his subsequent illness and a more recent breakdown in 1985, as well as what life has been like since then. Mark was named after **Mark Twain**, whom Vonnegut considered an American saint.^[30]

His daughter **Edith** ("Edie"), an artist, was named after Kurt Vonnegut's mother, Edith Lieber. She has had her work published in a book titled *Domestic Goddesses* and was once married to **Geraldo Rivera**. His youngest biological daughter, Nanette ("Nanny"), was named after Nanette Schnull, Vonnegut's paternal grandmother. She is married to realist painter **Scott Prior** and is the subject of several of his paintings, notably "Nanny and Rose."

Of Vonnegut's four adopted children, three are his nephews: James, Steven, and Kurt Adams; the fourth is Lily, a girl he adopted as an infant in 1982. James, Steven, and Kurt were adopted after a traumatic week in 1958, in which their father James Carmalt Adams was killed on September 15 in the **Newark Bay rail crash** when his commuter train went off the open **Newark Bay bridge** in **New Jersey**, and their mother — Kurt's sister Alice — died of cancer. In *Slapstick*, Vonnegut recounts that Alice's husband died two days before Alice herself, and her family tried to hide the knowledge from her, but she found out when an ambulatory patient gave her a copy of the *New York Daily News* a day before she herself died. The fourth and youngest of the boys, Peter

Nice, went to live with a first cousin of their father in [Birmingham, Alabama](#), as an infant. Lily is a singer, actress, and the producer of the YouTube series "The Most Popular Girls in School."

Vonnegut's first wife Jane Marie Cox later married [Adam Yarmolinsky](#)^[31] and wrote an account of the Vonneguts' life with the Adams children. It was published after her death as the book *Angels Without Wings: A Courageous Family's Triumph Over Tragedy*.^[32]

On November 11, 1999, an [asteroid](#) was named in Vonnegut's honor: [25399 Vonnegut](#).^[33]

A lifelong smoker, Vonnegut smoked unfiltered [Pall Mall](#) cigarettes, a habit he referred to as a "classy way to commit suicide."^[34]

Vonnegut taught at Harvard University, where he was a lecturer in English, and the [City College of New York](#), where he was a Distinguished Professor.^[35]

Vonnegut died on April 11, 2007, after falling down a flight of stairs in his home and suffering massive head trauma.^{[1][36][37]}

Writing career [edit]

Vonnegut's first short story, "[Report on the Barnhouse Effect](#)",^[38] appeared in the February 11, 1950, edition of *Collier's* (it has since been reprinted in his short story collection, *Welcome to the Monkey House*). His first novel was the [dystopian](#) novel *Player Piano* (1952), in which human workers have been largely replaced by machines. He continued to write short stories before his second novel, *The Sirens of Titan*, was published in 1959.^[39] Through the 1960s, the form of his work changed, from the relatively orthodox structure of *Cat's Cradle* (which in 1971 earned him a Master's Degree) to the acclaimed, semi-autobiographical *Slaughterhouse-Five*, given a more experimental structure by using time travel as a plot device. These structural experiments were continued in *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), which includes many rough illustrations, lengthy non-sequiturs, and an appearance by the author himself as a *deus ex machina*.

Breakfast of Champions became one of his best-selling novels. It includes, in addition to the author himself, several of Vonnegut's recurring characters. One of them, science fiction author [Kilgore Trout](#), plays a major role and interacts with the author's character.

In 1974, *Venus on the Half-Shell*, a book by [Philip José Farmer](#) in a style similar to that of Vonnegut and attributed to [Kilgore Trout](#), was published. This caused some confusion among readers, as for some time many assumed that Vonnegut wrote it; when the truth of its authorship came out, Vonnegut was reported as being "not amused." In an issue of the semi-prozine *The Alien Critic/Science Fiction Review*, published by [Richard E. Geis](#), Farmer claimed to have received an angry, obscenity-laden telephone call from Vonnegut about it.

Although many of his novels involved science fiction themes, they were widely read and reviewed outside the field, due in no small part to their [anti-authoritarianism](#). For example, in his seminal short story "[Harrison Bergeron](#)," [egalitarianism](#) is rigidly enforced by overbearing state authority, engendering horrific repression.

In much of his work, Vonnegut's own voice is apparent, often filtered through the character of science fiction author [Kilgore Trout](#) (whose name is based on that of real-life science fiction writer [Theodore Sturgeon](#)). It is characterized by wild leaps of imagination and a deep cynicism, tempered by humanism. In the foreword to *Breakfast of Champions*, Vonnegut wrote that as a child, he saw men with [locomotor ataxia](#), and it struck him that these men walked like broken machines; it followed that healthy people were working machines, suggesting that humans are helpless prisoners of [determinism](#). Vonnegut also explored this theme in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in which protagonist [Billy Pilgrim](#) "has come unstuck in time" and has so little control over his own life that he cannot even predict which part of it he will be living through from minute to minute. Vonnegut's well-known phrase "so it goes," used ironically in reference to death, also originated in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. "Its combination of simplicity, irony, and rue is very much in the Vonnegut vein."^[36]

With the publication of his novel *Timequake* in 1997, Vonnegut announced his retirement from writing fiction. He continued to write for the magazine *In These Times*, where he was a senior editor,^[40] until his death in 2007, focusing on subjects ranging from contemporary U.S. politics to simple observational pieces on topics such as a trip to the post office. In 2005, many of his essays were collected in a new bestselling book titled *A Man Without a Country*, which he insisted would be his last contribution to letters.^[41]

An August 2006 article reported:

He has stalled finishing his highly anticipated novel *If God Were Alive Today* — or so he claims. "I've given up on it... It won't happen... The Army kept me on because I could type, so I was typing other people's discharges and stuff. And my feeling was, 'Please, I've done everything I was supposed to do. Can I go home now?' That's what I feel right now. I've written books. Lots of them. Please, I've done everything I'm supposed to do. Can I go home now?"^[15]

The April 2008 issue of *Playboy* featured the first published excerpt from *Armageddon in Retrospect*, the first posthumous collection of Vonnegut's work. The book itself was published in the same month. It included never before published short stories by the writer and a letter that was written to his family during World War II when Vonnegut was captured as a prisoner of war. The book also contains drawings by Vonnegut and a speech he wrote shortly before his death. The introduction was written by his son, Mark Vonnegut.

Art career [edit]

Vonnegut's work as a graphic artist began with his illustrations for *Slaughterhouse-Five* and developed with *Breakfast of Champions*, which included numerous felt-tip pen illustrations. Many Vonnegut works of art can be found in his novels and short story collections such as *Armageddon in Retrospect*. Later in his career, he became more interested in art, particularly [silk-screen prints](#),^[42] which he pursued in collaboration with [Joe Petro III](#). Vonnegut cited artists [Paul Klee](#) and [Georges Braque](#) as particular influences.^[43] According to his daughter Nanette, Vonnegut was also influenced by illustrators [Al Hirschfeld](#) and [Edward Gorey](#).^[44]

In October 1980, Vonnegut exhibited his drawings in pen, pencil, and colored felt-tipped markers at the Margo Feiden Galleries

Ltd. in New York.^{[45][46][47]} Fellow writers Norman Mailer and George Plimpton attended the opening of Vonnegut's exhibition,^[48] as did television personality and fellow artist Morley Safer.^[49] Vonnegut would later remark, "I actually had a one-person show of drawings a few years back...in Greenwich Village, not because my pictures were any good but because people had heard of me."^[50] On the occasion of the show's opening, Vonnegut expressed his preference for using colored felt-tipped markers rather than oil paints or watercolor. "Oil is such a commitment," Vonnegut explained, whereas he found watercolors "too bland, too weak." However, he said, "they make such extraordinary Magic Markers, such brilliant colors. It makes things very easy." He also compared the creative process of drawing with that involved in writing. "If you make a mistake on a picture it's satisfying to wad it up and toss it out" he said. "When you have to do that with a written page, it's a more depressing failure."^[51] Whereas the writer is only satisfied upon the work's completion, Vonnegut said, "the act [of painting] itself is enjoyable."^[52] He further explained that "in a picture there may be 10 or 12 significant details. On a printed page there are 2,500."^[53] As to his art's significance, Vonnegut declared, "My drawings are as rare as exotic postage stamps. I'm a Sunday painter who's offering his work to the public. It's great to take a venture with absolutely no risk."^[49]

In 2004, Vonnegut participated in the project *The Greatest Album Covers That Never Were*, for which he created an album cover for **Phish** called *Hook, Line and Sinker*, which has been included in a traveling exhibition for the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame**.

Politics [edit]

Vonnegut was deeply influenced by early **Socialist** labor leaders, especially Indiana natives **Powers Hapgood** and **Eugene V. Debs**, and he frequently quoted them in his work. He named characters after both Debs (**Eugene Debs Hartke** in *Hocus Pocus* and Eugene Debs Metzger in *Deadeye Dick*) and Russian **Communist** leader **Leon Trotsky** (Leon Trotsky Trout in *Galápagos*). He was a lifetime member of the **American Civil Liberties Union** and was featured in a print advertisement for them.

In 1968, he signed the "**Writers and Editors War Tax Protest**" pledge, vowing to refuse tax payments in protest against the **Vietnam War**.^[54]

Vonnegut frequently addressed moral and political issues but rarely dealt with specific political figures until after his retirement from fiction. Though the downfall of Walter Starbuck, a minor **Nixon** administration bureaucrat who is the narrator and main character in *Jailbird* (1979), would not have occurred but for the **Watergate scandal**, the focus is not on the administration. His collection *God Bless You, Dr. Kevorkian* referenced controversial **assisted suicide** proponent **Jack Kevorkian**.

With his columns for *In These Times*, he began an attack on the **George W. Bush administration** and the **Iraq War**. "By saying that our leaders are power-drunk chimpanzees, am I in danger of wrecking the morale of our soldiers fighting and dying in the Middle East?" he wrote. "Their morale, like so many bodies, is already shot to pieces. They are being treated, as I never was, like toys a rich kid got for Christmas." *In These Times* quoted him as saying "The only difference between **Hitler** and **Bush** is that Hitler was elected."^{[55][56]} In a 2003 interview Vonnegut said, "I myself feel that our country, for whose Constitution I fought in a just war, might as well have been invaded by Martians and body snatchers. Sometimes I wish it had been. What has happened, though, is that it has been taken over by means of the sleaziest, low-comedy, **Keystone Cops**-style coup d'état imaginable. And those now in charge of the federal government are upper-crust C-students who know no history or geography, plus not-so-closeted **white supremacists**, aka 'Christians,' and plus, most frighteningly, **psychopathic** personalities, or 'PPs.'"^[57] When asked how he was doing at the start of a 2003 interview, he replied: "I'm mad about being old and I'm mad about being American. Apart from that, OK."^[58]

He did not regard the **2004 election** with much optimism; speaking of Bush and **John Kerry**, he said that "no matter which one wins, we will have a **Skull and Bones** President at a time when entire vertebrate species, because of how we have poisoned the topsoil, the waters and the atmosphere, are becoming, hey presto, nothing but skulls and bones."^[59]

In 2005, Vonnegut was interviewed by David Nason for *The Australian*. During the course of the interview Vonnegut was asked his opinion of modern terrorists, to which he replied, "I regard them as very brave people." When pressed further Vonnegut also said that "They **suicide bombers** are dying for their own self-respect. It's a terrible thing to deprive someone of their self-respect. It's [like] your culture is nothing, your Race is nothing, you're nothing ... It is sweet and noble—sweet and honourable I guess it is—to die for what you believe in." (This last statement is a reference to the line "**Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori**" ["it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country"] from **Horace's Odes**, or possibly to **Wilfred Owen's** ironic use of the line in his ***Dulce Et Decorum Est.***) Nason took offense at Vonnegut's comments and characterized him as an old man who "doesn't want to live any more ... and because he can't find anything worthwhile to keep him alive, he finds defending terrorists somehow amusing." Vonnegut's son, Mark, responded to the article by writing an editorial to the ***Boston Globe*** in which he explained the reasons behind his father's "provocative posturing" and stated that "If these commentators can so badly misunderstand and underestimate an utterly unguarded English-speaking 83-year-old man with an extensive public record of saying exactly what he thinks, maybe we should worry about how well they understand an enemy they can't figure out what to call."^[60]

A 2006 interview with ***Rolling Stone*** stated, "... it's not surprising that he disdains everything about the **Iraq War**. The very notion that more than 2,500 U.S. soldiers have been killed in what he sees as an unnecessary conflict makes him groan. 'Honestly, I wish Nixon were president,' Vonnegut laments. 'Bush is so ignorant.'"^[15]

Though he was a dissident to the end, Vonnegut held a bleak view on the power of artists to effect change. "During the Vietnam War," he told an interviewer in 2003, "every respectable artist in this country was against the war. It was like a laser beam. We were all aimed in the same direction. The power of this weapon turns out to be that of a custard pie dropped from a stepladder six feet high."^[58]

Religion [edit]

Vonnegut was descended from a family of German **freethinkers**, who were skeptical of "conventional religious beliefs."^[61] His great-grandfather, Clemens Vonnegut, had authored a freethought book titled *Instruction in Morals*, as well as an address for his own funeral in which he denied the existence of God, an afterlife, and Christian doctrines about sin and salvation. Kurt Vonnegut reproduced his great-grandfather's funeral address in his book ***Palm Sunday***, and identified these freethought views as his "ancestral religion," declaring it a mystery as to how it was passed on to him.^[62]

Vonnegut described himself variously as a **skeptic**,^[62] **freethinker**,^[63] **humanist**,^[63] **Unitarian Universalist**,^[64] **agnostic**,^[62] and

atheist.^[65] He disbelieved in the supernatural,^[62] considered religious doctrine to be "so much arbitrary, clearly invented balderdash," and believed people were motivated to join religions out of loneliness.^[66] He rejected the divinity of Jesus,^[65] but was nevertheless an admirer of the *Sermon on the Mount*.^[67] In 2003, he was one of the signatories of the *Humanist Manifesto*.^[68]

Vonnegut considered *humanism* to be a modern-day form of freethought,^[69] and advocated it in various writings, speeches and interviews. His ties to organized humanism included membership as a Humanist Laureate in the *Council for Secular Humanism's* International Academy of Humanism.^[70] In 1992, the *American Humanist Association* named him the Humanist of the Year. Vonnegut went on to serve as honorary president of the American Humanist Association (AHA), having taken over the position from his late colleague *Isaac Asimov*, and serving until his own death in 2007.^[71] In a letter to AHA members, Vonnegut wrote: "I am a humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to behave decently without expectations of rewards or punishments after I am dead."^[72]

Vonnegut was at one time a member of a Unitarian congregation.^{[62][73]} *Palm Sunday* reproduces a sermon he delivered to the First Parish Unitarian Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, concerning *William Ellery Channing*, who was a principal founder of Unitarianism in the United States. In 1986, Vonnegut spoke to a gathering of Unitarian Universalists in Rochester, New York, and the text of his speech is reprinted in his book *Fates Worse Than Death*. Also reprinted in that book was a "mass" by Vonnegut, which was performed by a Unitarian Universalist choir in Buffalo, New York.^[74] Vonnegut identified Unitarianism as the religion that many in his freethinking family turned to when freethought and other German "enthusiasms" became unpopular in the United States during the World Wars.^[63] Vonnegut's parents were married by a Unitarian minister, and his son had at one time aspired to become a Unitarian minister.^[62]

Self-assessment [edit]

In his book *Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction*, Vonnegut listed eight rules for writing a short story:

1. Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.
2. Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.
3. Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
4. Every sentence must do one of two things—reveal character or advance the action.
5. Start as close to the end as possible.
6. Be a Sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them—in order that the reader may see what they are made of.
7. Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.
8. Give your readers as much information as possible as soon as possible. To hell with suspense. Readers should have such complete understanding of what is going on, where and why, that they could finish the story themselves, should cockroaches eat the last few pages.

Vonnegut qualifies the list by adding that *Flannery O'Connor* broke all these rules except the first, and that great writers tend to do that. He wrote an *earlier version of writing tips* that was even more straightforward and contained only seven rules (though it advised using *Elements of Style* for more indepth advice).

In "The Sexual Revolution", Chapter 18 of his book *Palm Sunday*, Vonnegut grades his own works. He states that the grades "do not place me in literary history" and that he is comparing "myself with myself." The grades are as follows:

- *Player Piano*: B
- *The Sirens of Titan*: A
- *Mother Night*: A
- *Cat's Cradle*: A-plus
- *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*: A
- *Slaughterhouse-Five*: A-plus
- *Welcome to the Monkey House*: B-minus
- *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*: D
- *Breakfast of Champions*: C
- *Wampeters, Foma and Granfaloon*: C
- *Slapstick*: D
- *Jailbird*: A
- *Palm Sunday*: C

Appearances [edit]

- Vonnegut held a cup of coffee and appeared on screen for about 1.5 seconds in a 1984 commercial sponsored by the *National Coffee Association*.^[75]
- Vonnegut played himself in a *cameo* in 1986's *Back to School*, in which he is hired by *Rodney Dangerfield's* Thornton Melon to write a paper on the topic of the novels of Kurt Vonnegut. Recognizing the work is not Melon's own, Professor Turner tells him, "Whoever *did* write this doesn't know the first thing about Kurt Vonnegut."
- Vonnegut also made brief cameos in the film adaptations of his novels *Mother Night* and *Breakfast of Champions*.
- Vonnegut appeared in the opening sequence of Showtime's 1991 anthology series *Kurt Vonnegut's Monkey House*, based on his short stories.
- Vonnegut narrated and wrote the narrative of two oratorios with composer *Dave Soldier*, recorded by the *Manhattan Chamber Orchestra*: *A Soldier's Story*, based on the execution of Private *Eddie Slovik* and *Ice-9 Ballads*, adapted from *Cat's Cradle*.
- Vonnegut recorded a number of first-person voice-overs for Ken Burns's documentary *The Civil War*, including one of a young soldier reflecting on a visit with a prostitute.
- Vonnegut appeared briefly in the 2005 dramatic documentary *The American Ruling Class*, playing himself.

- Vonnegut appeared briefly in the 2005 Dutch release of the three-part BBC documentary *D-Day to Berlin: The allies' journey to victory*, telling about his memories of the bombing of Dresden.
- Vonnegut was interviewed in August 2006 on the national weekly public radio program *The Infinite Mind*, from inside the 3-D virtual on-line community Second Life. The program made broadcast history^[76] as the first to be taped inside a virtual world, and it was the author's last face-to-face sit-down interview. The host was The Infinite Mind's *John Hockenberry*, who was with Vonnegut in the studio as the program was taped. Vonnegut's virtual interview was taped in front of a virtual audience of 100 people from around the world at the 16-acre (65,000 m²) virtual broadcast center created by producer Bill Lichtenstein and Lichtenstein Creative Media,^[77] which produces The Infinite Mind.
- Vonnegut was featured in the film *Never Down* in 2007, and appeared in several scenes as Robert.
- Vonnegut appeared in a forty-minute conversation with Adrian Mitchell in a 1982 BBC Two TV program, together with a rebroadcast of a surrealistic NET drama based on his work.

Tributes [edit]

- A sort of anti-tribute appears in *Larry Niven* and *Jerry Pournelle's* novel *Inferno*, which is set in Dante's Hell. The protagonist, a version of Niven himself, encounters Vonnegut's tomb in the city of Dis; another character theorizes it is punishment for Vonnegut's satire of religion in several of his stories. Above the tomb is a green neon sign which blinks "SO IT GOES", a central refrain which appears in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.
- The 2009 Hollywood adaptation of Vonnegut's story "*Harrison Bergeron*", a film entitled *2081* is dedicated "To Kurt Vonnegut, Jr."
- At the annual *Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library* McFadden Memorial Lecture at *Butler University* in Indianapolis, on April 27, 2007, where Vonnegut was being honored posthumously, his son Mark delivered a speech that the author wrote for the event, and which was reported as the last thing he wrote. It ends with this: "I thank you for your attention, and I'm outta here."^[78]
- The satirical newspaper *The Onion* contained a tribute to Vonnegut soon after he died, with a reference to his work *Slaughterhouse-Five* stating that he shouldn't be referred to as dead "without checking Dresden for his younger self first."^[79]
- On November 11, 2007, *Wynkoop Brewing Company* in *Denver* reintroduced Kurt's Mile High Malt to celebrate the late author's birthday.^[80]
- When Vonnegut died, members of the Alplaus Volunteer Fire Department in New York lowered the American flag to half staff, hung the funeral shroud, and rang a fire bell in accordance with the traditional 5-5-5 alarm used to honor fallen brothers. Vonnegut's name still appears on an old active fire-fighters roster, located next to a screen-print that he donated to the department.
- The *Elvis Costello* song "Man Out Of Time" is based on the character *Billy Pilgrim*.
- The 1975 song "Nice, Nice, Very Nice" by the rock band *Ambrosia* uses lyrics Vonnegut wrote for his 1963 novel *Cat's Cradle*. Vonnegut was delighted with the song and shared a writing credit with the band.^[81]
- On Massachusetts Avenue in Indianapolis, Indiana (Vonnegut's hometown) there is a 40-foot mural of Vonnegut. Indianapolis is also home to the *Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library*.
- The *Born Ruffians* included in their debut album, *Red, Yellow & Blue*, a song entitled "Kurt Vonnegut", which contains lines from Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*.
- "Members Only" a song by The Mad Conductor (an experimental hip hop band fronted by MC Devlin aka Chris Tray, references a quote from the book of Bokonon in *Cat's Cradle* "Tiger got to hunt, bird got to fly, Man got to sit and wonder 'why, why, why?' Tiger got to sleep, bird got to land, Man got to tell himself he understand."
- "Happiness By The Kilowatt", a song by Canadian Post-Hardcore band *Alexisonfire*, makes several references to the Vonnegut's short story "The Euphio Question."

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See also [edit]

- *List of peace activists*

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- Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library The nation's only library/museum dedicated to Kurt Vonnegut



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v · t · e	Works by Kurt Vonnegut [hide]
Novels	<i>Player Piano</i> (1952) · <i>The Sirens of Titan</i> (1959) · <i>Mother Night</i> (1961) · <i>Cat's Cradle</i> (1963) · <i>God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater</i> (1965) · <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> (1969) · <i>Breakfast of Champions</i> (1973) · <i>Slapstick</i> (1976) · <i>Jailbird</i> (1979) · <i>Deadeye Dick</i> (1982) · <i>Galápagos</i> (1985) · <i>Bluebeard</i> (1987) · <i>Hocus Pocus</i> (1990) · <i>Timequake</i> (1997) ·
Story collections	<i>Canary in a Cathouse</i> (1961) · <i>Welcome to the Monkey House</i> (1968) · <i>Bagombo Snuff Box</i> (1999) · <i>God Bless You, Dr. Kevorkian</i> (1999) · <i>Armageddon in Retrospect</i> (2008) · <i>Look at the Birdie</i> (2009) · <i>While Mortals Sleep</i> (2011) · <i>Sucker's Portfolio</i> (2013) ·
Collected essays	<i>Wampeters, Foma and Granfaloon</i> (1974) · <i>Palm Sunday</i> (1981) · <i>Fates Worse Than Death</i> (1991) · <i>A Man Without a Country</i> (2005) · <i>Armageddon in Retrospect</i> (2008) ·
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Adaptations	<i>Displaced Person</i> (1958, 1985) · <i>Happy Birthday, Wanda June</i> (1971) · <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> (1972) · <i>Between Time and Timbuktu</i> (1972) · <i>Next Door</i> (1975) · <i>Slapstick of Another Kind</i> (1982) · <i>Who Am I This Time?</i> (1982) · <i>Harrison Bergeron</i> (1995) · <i>Mother Night</i> (1996) · <i>Breakfast of Champions</i> (1999) · <i>2081</i> (2009) ·
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Categories: Kurt Vonnegut | 1922 births | 2007 deaths | Accidental deaths from falls | Accidental deaths in New York | American agnostics | American anti–Iraq War activists | American anarchists | American atheists | American humanists | American military personnel of World War II | American pacifists | American prisoners of war in World War II | American satirists | American socialists | Anarcho-pacifists | University of Tennessee alumni | American tax resisters | American Unitarian Universalists | Cornell University alumni | General Electric people | Iowa Writers' Workshop faculty | Members of the American Academy of Arts and Letters | People from Barnstable, Massachusetts | People from Indianapolis, Indiana | Recipients of the Purple Heart medal | United States Army soldiers | University of Chicago alumni | University of Iowa faculty | World War II prisoners of war held by Germany | Vonnegut family | Carnegie Mellon University alumni | Harvard University faculty | City College of New York faculty | American people of German descent | American essayists | American science fiction writers | American short story writers | Writers from Indiana | Writers from Massachusetts | Writers who illustrated their own writing | American male writers | 20th-century American writers | 20th-century American novelists | Postmodern writers | American male novelists

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