

Program: Vonnegut on the Planet

Speaker: Chris Lafave, Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library Curator

Attendance: 105

Guests: We have no Guests listed today because their hosts neglected to sign them in at the cashier's table. Be sure to sign in your guests so we can acknowledge their attendance.

Scribe: Jerry Kurlander

Editor: Jim Willson

Kurt Vonnegut was born in Indianapolis Indiana in 1922. He died in Manhattan New York as a result of a traumatic brain injury in 2007. This occurred when he became entangled in a dog leash while he was walking his dog.

He was an American writer whose career spanned over 50 years. He published 14 novels, three short story collections, five plays and five works of nonfiction. In 1969 he published his best-selling novel "Slaughterhouse-Five".

He came from a very prominent Indianapolis family of German origin. His father as well as his grandfather were successful architects, having designed several buildings in the city, many of which are still standing as landmarks. Vonnegut's mother was from high society in Indianapolis. Although his brother and sister were able to attend private school he attended public school. The family suffered a severe economic set back as a result of the depression and funds were no longer available for his schooling. He did attend fine public schools in Indianapolis including PS 43, now known as the James Whitcomb Riley School and the eminent Shortridge High School. The high school had a daily newspaper for which he was a writer. He enrolled in Cornell University in Ithaca, New York where he also wrote for the school newspaper. There he strongly opposed the US intervention in World War II

Instead of being drafted in the army he enlisted in 1943. While he was in the army he learned that his mother had committed suicide. She had been suffering from mental illness for a long period. In December 1944 he fought in the Battle of the Bulge, the final German offensive of the war. Vonnegut was taken prisoner and transported to Dresden Germany. He lived in a slaughterhouse while being imprisoned there. In February 1945 Dresden became the target of the allied forces. A fierce firebombing was carried out killing more than 25,000 people, mostly civilians.

After the war he returned to the United States and married his high school sweetheart, Jane Marie Cox, a Swarthmore graduate. He attended several colleges and had several jobs but finally moved to Cape Cod Massachusetts to write full-time. He made a living writing magazine articles for the likes of Colliers, the Saturday Evening Post, and Cosmopolitan magazines. In addition he wrote several good books but none to great acclaim. During this period his brother-in-law and beloved sister Alice both died in a very short time. He adopted their orphaned children.

After spending two years at the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for research in Germany. By the time he won it he was becoming a well-known writer. He returned to Dresden and gathered material for a book, "Slaughter-House Five", which immediately rocketed him to fame and the top of the New York Times bestseller list. Attention

was then drawn to many of his earlier books, particularly among college students.

Mr. Lafave then pointed out many of the features of the Vonnegut Memorial Library. It is located in downtown Indianapolis at the junction of Vermont and Senate Avenues and contains many artifacts from the life of Kurt Vonnegut.



Chris Lafave