

Kurt Vonnegut - Author - Biography.com

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Kurt Vonnegut was an American author best known for the novels *Cat's Cradle*, *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Breakfast of Champions*.

Synopsis

Kurt Vonnegut was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on November 11, 1922. Vonnegut emerged as a novelist and essayist in the 1960s, and penned the classics *Cat's Cradle*, *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Breakfast of Champions* before 1980. He is known for his satirical literary style, as well as the science-fiction elements in much of his work. Vonnegut died in New York City on April 11, 2007.



Early Life

Born on November 11, 1922, in Indianapolis, Indiana, Kurt Vonnegut is considered one of the most influential American novelists of the twentieth century. He blended literature with science fiction and humor, the absurd with pointed social commentary. Vonnegut created his own unique world in each of his novels and filled them with unusual characters, such as the alien race known as the Tralfamadorians in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969).

After studying at Cornell University from 1940 to 1942, Kurt Vonnegut enlisted in the U.S. Army. He was sent by the Army to what is now Carnegie Mellon University to study engineering in 1943. The next year, he served in Europe and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. After this battle, Vonnegut was captured and became a prisoner of war. He was in Dresden, Germany, during the Allied firebombing of the city and saw the complete devastation caused by it. Vonnegut himself escaped harm only because he, along with other POWs, was working in an underground meat locker making vitamin supplements.

Soon after his return from the war, Kurt Vonnegut married his high school girlfriend, Jane Marie Cox. The couple had three children. He worked several jobs before his writing career took off, including newspaper reporter, teacher, and public relations employee for General Electric. The Vonneguts also adopted his sister's three children after her death in 1958.

Writing Debut

Showing Vonnegut's talent for satire, his first novel, *Player Piano*, took on corporate culture and was published in 1952. More novels followed, including *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), *Mother Night* (1961), and *Cat's Cradle* (1963). War remained a recurring element in his work, and one of his best-known works, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, draws some of its dramatic power from his own experiences. The main character, Billy Pilgrim, is a young soldier who becomes a prisoner of war and works in an underground meat locker, not unlike Vonnegut, but with a notable exception: Pilgrim begins to experience his life out of sequence and revisits different times repeatedly. He also has encounters with the Tralfamadorians. This exploration of the human condition mixed with the fantastical struck a chord with readers, giving Vonnegut his first best-selling novel.

Further Success

Emerging as a new literary voice, Kurt Vonnegut became known for his unusual writing style—long sentences and little punctuation—as well as his humanist point of view. He continued writing short stories and novels, including *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), *Jailbird* (1979) and *Deadeye Dick* (1982). Vonnegut even made himself the subject of *Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage* (1981).

Despite his success, Kurt Vonnegut wrestled with his own personal demons. Having struggled with depression on and off for years, he attempted to take his own life in 1984. Whatever challenges he faced personally, Vonnegut became a literary icon with a devoted following. He counted writers such as Joseph Heller, another WWII veteran, as his friends.

Later Years

His last novel was *Timequake* (1997), which became a best seller despite receiving mixed reviews. Kurt Vonnegut chose to spend his later years working on nonfiction. His last book was *A Man Without a Country*, a collection of biographical essays. In it, he expressed his views on politics and art, and shed more light on his own life.

Kurt Vonnegut died on April 11, 2007, at the age of 84, as a result of head injuries sustained in a fall at his home in New York a few weeks earlier. He was survived by his second wife, photographer Jill Krementz, their adopted daughter, Lily, and six children from his first marriage.