

Kurt
Vonnegut
(1922-
2007)



Early Years

- ▶ Born in Indianapolis, Indiana on Armistice Day (November 11), 1922
- ▶ Family fairly wealthy
- ▶ Father and grandfather both architects





Family

- ▶ Great-grandparents part of “vast migration of Germans to the Midwest in the half century from 1820 to 1870” (Palm Sunday 18).
- ▶ Merchants, musicians, teachers, civil servants
- ▶ Religious free-thinkers and atheists

School Years



- ▶ Family lost wealth during the Great Depression, so Kurt (unlike his siblings) sent to public school
- ▶ First learned to write for *The Shortridge Echo*, his high school's daily newspaper

Growing Up in Indianapolis

- ▶ That city gave me a free primary and secondary education richer and more humane than anything I would get from any of the five universities I attended. . . . It had a widespread system of free libraries whose attendants seemed to my young mind to be angels of fun with information. There were cheap movie houses and jazz joints everywhere. There was a fine symphony orchestra, and I took lessons from Ernst Michaelis, its first-chair clarinet. (*Fates Worse Than Death* 97)

Comedy

- ▶ As youngest child in family, learned to tell jokes at the dinner table
- ▶ Loved the slapstick humor of Laurel & Hardy and 1930's radio comedians, whom he studied intensely



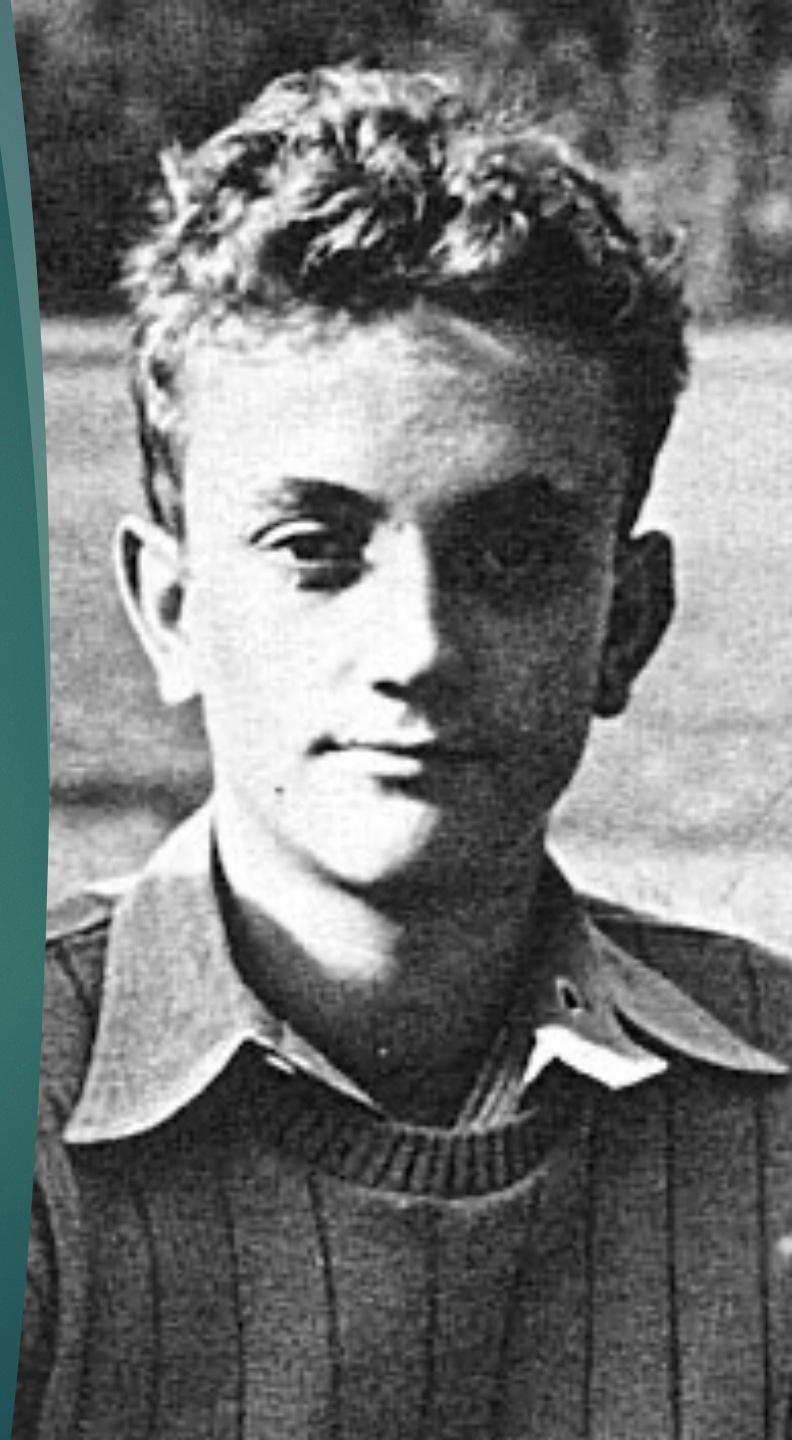
College

- ▶ Enrolled at Cornell University in 1940
- ▶ His father pushed him to study science, so he became a bio-chemistry major



Cornell Daily Sun

- ▶ Didn't do well in his studies (would have preferred the humanities)
- ▶ Became a reporter and editor for college newspaper, *The Cornell Daily Sun*



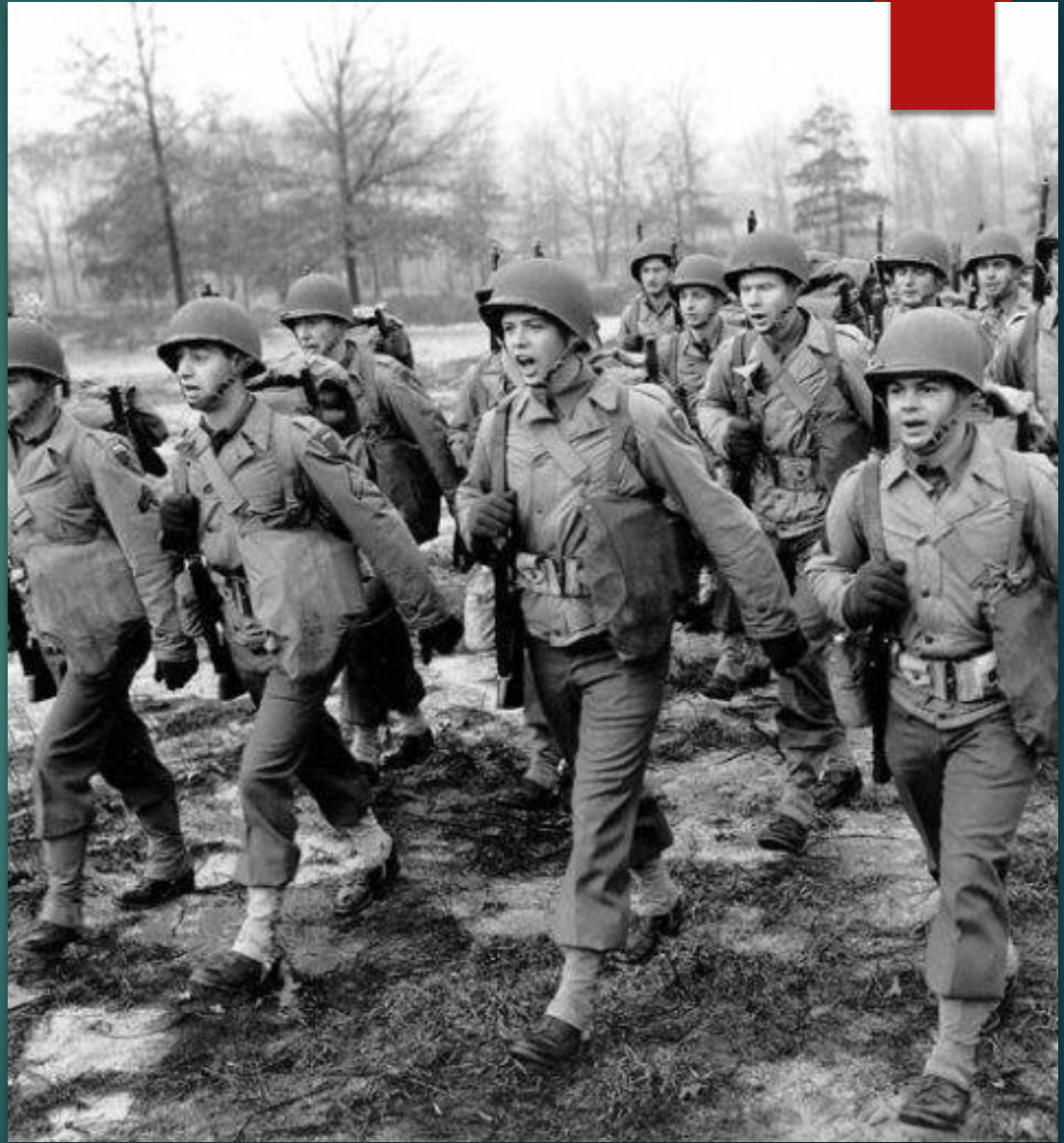


Army

- ▶ Contracted pneumonia in 1943 and left college without graduating
- ▶ Enlisted in the U.S. Army

1944

- ▶ Was trained as an infantry battalion scout
- ▶ Mother's suicide on May 14, 1944
- ▶ Shipped overseas in August of that same year





Captured

- ▶ Vonnegut captured by Germans on December 22, 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge

Dresden

- ▶ Shipped in a boxcar to POW camp south of Dresden
- ▶ Put to work in a factory that manufactured a vitamin-fortified malt syrup for pregnant women



Bombing

- ▶ Quartered in a cement slaughterhouse, where he survived the Allied firebombing of the city on the night of February 13, 1945





Corpse Mines

- ▶ After bombing, put to work digging out corpses, burning the bodies.

After the War



- ▶ Returned home in May of 1945
- ▶ Married his childhood sweetheart, Jane Cox, on September 1, 1945

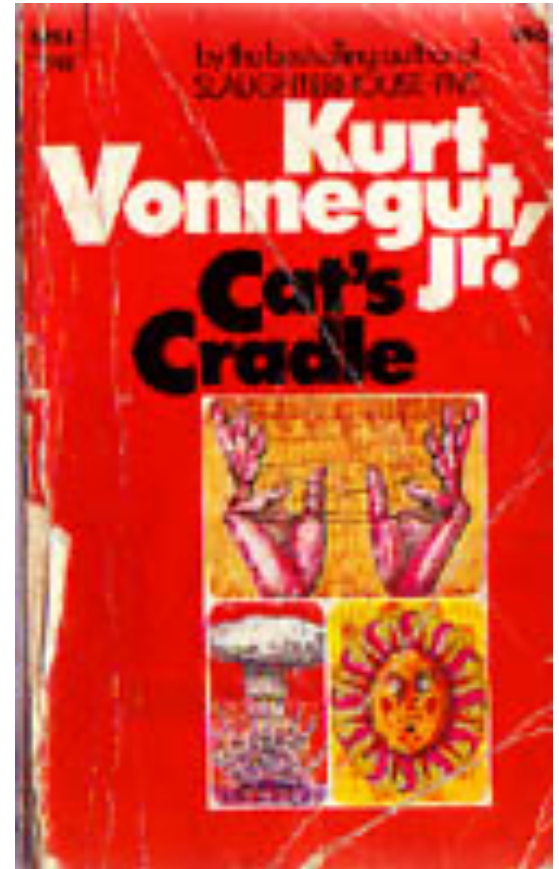
Chicago



- ▶ Studied anthropology as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, 1945-1947
- ▶ Also worked as a reporter for the Chicago City News Bureau during this time

Chicago, cont.

- ▶ Master's Thesis unanimously rejected by his thesis committee
- ▶ Though later (1971) was awarded the M.A. for *Cat's Cradle*, which faculty members decided made a "significant contribution" to the field of cultural anthropology



General Electric

- ▶ Moved to Schenectady, NY to take a job as a publicity man for GE
- ▶ Gathered material for early science fiction work as well as first novel, *Player Piano*

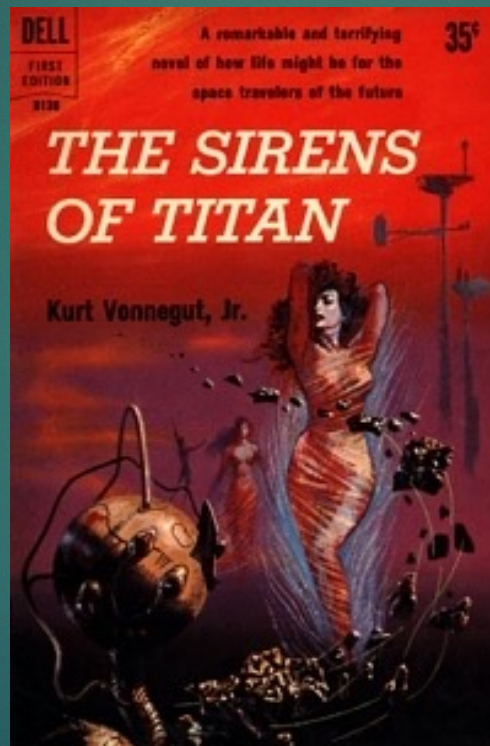
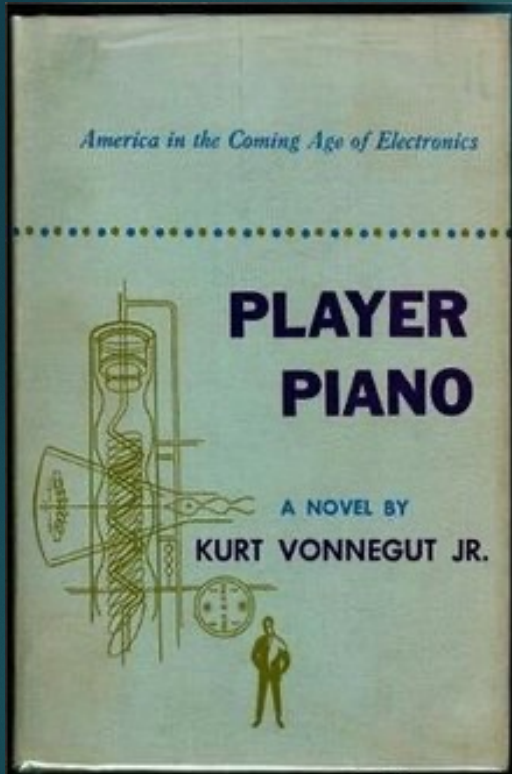


Early Fiction



- ▶ Published his first short story, "Report on the Barnhouse Effect" in *Collier's* magazine in 1950
- ▶ Sold several more, able to quit GE, move to Cape Cod

First Novels



- ▶ *Player Piano* published in 1952. About a not-so-distant future where machines do almost all of the work
- ▶ *The Sirens of Titan* published in 1959. Involves a Martian invasion of Earth (among other things)

Family Life

- ▶ Death of sister Alice and her husband, James Carmalt Adams, within 48 hours of each other
- ▶ Vonneguts adopted the couples' three oldest boys, ages 9, 11, and 14 (already had 3 children of their own).



Mother Night

- ▶ Published in 1962
- ▶ Inspired by the British “Lord Haw Haw,” William Joyce
- ▶ Transmitted Nazi propaganda to Britain via radio broadcasts (executed for treason in 1946)





Cat's Cradle

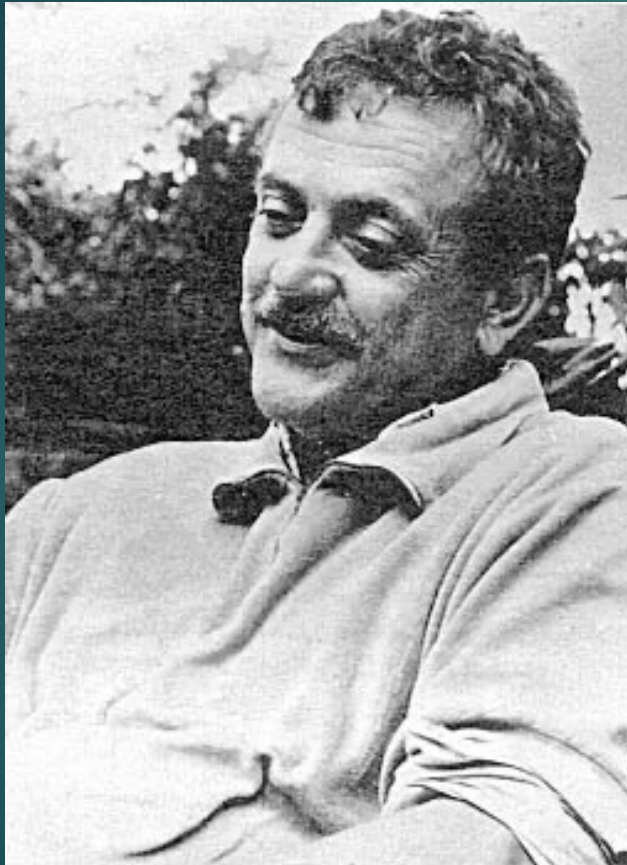
- ▶ Published in 1963
- ▶ Earned Vonnegut a small, but devoted cult following, especially among college students



Iowa Writer's Workshop

- ▶ Taught at the Iowa Writer's Workshop from 1965-1967
- ▶ Published *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* in 1965
- ▶ Returned to Dresden on a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1967

Slaughterhouse-Five



- ▶ *Slaughterhouse-Five* published in 1969
- ▶ Critically acclaimed
- ▶ Made Vonnegut famous and wealthy
- ▶ Began practice of more specifically meta-fictional and autobiographical writing

1970's



- ▶ In early 70's, lectured at colleges, dabbled in journalism and playwriting, wrote numerous magazine articles and reviews
- ▶ Taught creative writing at Harvard for a brief time

Later Novels

Later novels include:

- ▶ Breakfast of Champions, 1973
- ▶ Slapstick, 1976
- ▶ Jailbird, 1979
- ▶ Deadeye Dick, 1982
- ▶ Galápagos, 1985
- ▶ Bluebeard, 1987
- ▶ Hocus Pocus, 1990
- ▶ Timequake, 1997





Later Life

- ▶ Lived mostly in Manhattan
- ▶ Married to photographer Jill Krementz (separated from Jane Cox in 1971)
- ▶ Final book was *A Man Without a Country*, published in 2005



Later Life, cont.



- ▶ Turned mostly to the visual arts
- ▶ Sold silkscreens with Kentucky artist Joe Petro III
- ▶ Made from his line drawings, some of which were published in his novels
- ▶ Died in April of 2007

