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 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. lectures about his work, 2 pts

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# Speaker List:

* Donna Leipziger (DL)
* Kurt Vonnegut (KV)

# Provided Transcript:­­

## Part 1 of 2:

[00:00:02]

>> Donna Leipziger [DL]: Welcome to tonight's lecture. I'd like to thank you all very much for coming. Um, in case you're wondering who I am, my name is Dara Leipziger and I'm Lecture Chairperson of the University Unions Program Board who helped make this event possible. [APPLAUSE] I just want to mention before we start that there are exits all around the building and that smoking is prohibited in this auditorium. [APPLAUSE]

[00:00:42]

Tonight, we have a very special treat for you. On behalf of the University Unions Program Board in co-sponsorship with the Oliphant Fellowship Fund, and the *Cornell Daily Sun*, [APPLAUSE] we are very happy to welcome back to Cornell Mr. Kurt Vonnegut.

[APPLAUSE]

>>Kurt Vonnegut [KV]: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I have been invited back here three times.

[00:01:43]

It’s first for the, by the *Cornell Sun* to speak at its hundredth anniversary. At which time I said the *Sun* I believe is half as old as the saxophone and twice as old as the electric guitar. Second invitation was to speak on the subject of Vladimir Nabokov,

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and I was honored. I declined because I do not think Vladimir, Vladimir Nabokov would like me very much. I have sensed that [CHUCKLE] from his readings, I mean, from, from his writings. And I've been aware for a long time that I’m, that there are some novelists who are not like me at all, and-

 [LAUGHTER]

[00:02:42]

Did somebody say something? Anyway. I brought this up, uh, with Saul Steinberg, the great graphic artist who knows everything, and I said, “Saul, I go to meetings of novelists and we all appear to be in the same business in what we manufacture. What I make resembles what they make, but I'm not in the same business at all. I can hardly talk to them and they're deeply embarrassed to try to talk to me.” [LAUGHTER] and

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he said, “It is very simple. There are two sorts of artists. One sort is not superior to the other, but they are strikingly different. One sort of artist responds to art history so far, and the other responds simply to life itself.” And this was a very interesting distinction to me. It's true. It explained why I was unable to, uh,

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speak to some of my supposed brother novelists and why I felt very uneasy in the presence here of the ghost of Volodya Nabokov. He is, he responds greatly to art history, and brilliantly to art history so far. There are many learned references to great works of art in the past and, uh,

[00:04:16]

I do not present such credentials. There's no evidence that I am building on the past at all, *although I could*, I want you to know. [APPLAUSE]. I think one reason, there's a great mystery, or to me, it's a mystery of why Russians like our literature so much and why we like Russian literature so much.

[00:04:48]

And I think that it's because we're both peasant societies where the writers do not present their aristocratic credentials; do not demonstrate that they have read widely, that they've taken the *grand tour* and so forth. That they know how to pick wines and that sort of thing. I came to Cornell

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because my uncle Tony was a great quarter miler here. He may, he’s, Tony Vonnegut may still have been, may still, his records may remain unbroken for all I know. They were unbroken when I came here, and I certainly didn't try. [LAUGHTER] I don't know whether it's fair that he should hold records because there was something funny about his little toes; he did not have normal feet and should have been disqualified, I think. [LAUGHTER]

[00:05:49]

His little toes were hooked over the next toe in, which may be ideal for the quarter mile. [LAUGHTER] You had a very great writer here in Ithaca who had who had no wish to become a world figure in letters, a man named Romain Berry [sp?] who wrote for the Alumni News for many years, and he wrote as well as anybody in this world, mostly about affairs in Ithaca. And I read an essay by him on the subject of people who did not like Cornell, who had not been happy here, and he said that Cornell was going to have to expect a little of that, as he was resigned that some people were not going to like it here no matter what, and I am one of those.

[00:06:54]

And, [APPLAUSE] and I probably should never have gone to college! I wouldn’t have missed a thing. [APPLAUSE, LAUGHTER] But made-, I was forced to study chemistry, either that or work my way through college, as my father would pay my way through college if I would study chemistry. He felt that I would always be able to get a job if I were a chemist. And my brother was already a big-time chemist, and this was in the early days of the Second World War and the Germans seemed to be doing wonderful things with chemistry.

[00:07:37]

But what saved me here was the *Cornell Sun.* Is I loved it. That was as happy as I've ever been in my life, was, was working on the *Sun*. I, I was down at the office all the time and at that time it was traditional for anyone who held a, an important job at the *Sun* to flunk out. [LAUGHTER]

[00:08:02]

And it was honorable tradition. And so, I was looking forward to that and [LAUGHTER] [KV LAUGHS] my, my career was, was interrupted by Pearl Harbor. If, if the Japanese had not bombed Pearl Harbor, I would have flunked out. Good thing about writing for the *Sun* and not studying literature here was that I wrote for an audience, always an audience I was going to meet the very next day. I have never written for a teacher. And I went to a high school, well, that, I, I like teachers, so I’ll talk about that.

[00:08:50]

But it explains an awful lot about the way I write. I have always written for an audience. I went for a, a, went to a whizbang high school in Indianapolis which had a daily newspaper and had had for 50 years before I ever went to that high school.

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And so, I have always written for an audience I was going to see the next day, as I would stay after school and the next day my peers would tell me whether they liked what I had done or not. And when I was working on the *Sun* my peers were telling me whether they liked what I'd done or not, which explains the simple-mindedness of what I write, as I’ve never, [LAUGHTER]

[00:09:32]

never, never had to write for anybody particularly bright. [LAUGHTER] And on the *Sun* we were all going to be writers. We were all going to be journalists, and I still remember the names of the, of those giants of those times, people ahead of me by one year or two, is William Jacoby Huff and Spanky MacFarland and Basil Abbink, we're all going to be writers.

[00:10:04]

Well, there was a game we used to play then, and maybe you guys play it now, where everybody yells at once. Do you know how that goes, to see how much noise you can make? [LAUGHTER] You know, everybody, you get a whole lot of people together, maybe this many, see? And everybody's going to yell as loud as he can.

[00:10:25]

And you go 1 – 2 - 3 and everybody's utterly silent but one person who just ruptures his larynx. [KV LAUGHS] [LAUGHTER] And so there at this, [LAUGHTER] [KV LAUGHS] I'll tell you a good thing to do in the chemistry lab too, but I gotta finish this thought first. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] Anyway, we were all going to become writers, you know, and I was the only guy who did as they all went into much more lucrative professions and everything, and so I was like the only person who yelled in that whole bunch. And I went on into journalism and then I went on to be a writer. And what you can do in a chemistry laboratory if you're going to flunk out anyway is to, is to hook the water line to the gas line with a piece of rubber hose and turn ‘em both on and it fills a gas line with water, so the next guy who turns on his Bunsen burner gets water out of it. [KV LAUGHS] [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE]

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But don't do it! For the love of God, don't really do it! [LAUGHTER] Looking back on my Cornell days, I'm amazed by how drunk we were and how reputable. [LAUGHTER] And I don't look at it, uh, with amusement at all. I look at it, it's dereliction on the, on the part of, of grown-ups in America in those days. It was utterly acceptable that I should be bombed out of my skull, just terribly drunk at the age of 19, 18. And drunk driving going on and it was all perfectly okay, and I guess that's when I decided this country was crazy.

[00:12:40]

I had a title for this speech before I knew what I was going to say and it was called, may, perhaps somebody told you what the title was, it's *How to Get a Job Like Mine* and so I will address that some. I got interested in this sort of a job during the Depression,

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in Indianapolis, which was deeper than in most places, you can imagine. And my mother thought she could write her way out of the Depression; get some money writing stories. Other people were trying to tap dance their way out of the Depression and play the xylophone out of the Depression. And these dreams weren't all that foolish as the entertainment industry was very big. Incidentally I am numbering Depressions now, this, I'm talking about Great Depression Number 1, as we're now in Great Depression Number 2. [APPLAUSE]

[00:13:43]

But anyway, my mother took lessons at night, subscribed to all the magazines about how to write stories, and, uh, there was nothing comical in this. There was a lot to be known about storytelling, as indeed there is now. And most of the advice to hack writers is based on a very reputable source, which is the *Poetics* of Aristotle. And in, during the Depression, *Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers* were making so much money and were so desperately in need of stories. They needed five short stories a week plus an installment of a serial. There's a huge market there. They would pay you enough for one short story, you could, you could go out and buy a car if you wanted.

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Uh, people would, uh, sit down at the kitchen table and, and write a short story, and by God, sell it, and, uh, pay for the baby, and that sort of thing. It was a sensible dream my mother had, and she was older than I was and [LAUGHTER] so I was, I would, I would put, put body English on her dreams, and study her lessons along with her, and she didn't quite make it, and I did, ‘cause I learned how to tell stories. And it's fun to know. Now how are you going to get into this field? Well, there are no fellowships for people like you. There are no advances for people like you, for beginners.

[00:15:27]

You get a Guggenheim when you don't need it. I g- I got a Guggenheim when I was 48 years old. I had applied three times, twice when I’d really needed one, and, uh, once for the hell of it and the third time I had a university affiliation. I was,

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I was a lecturer on the faculty of a state university, Iowa. And also, I was regionally very attractive in Iowa, as the Guggenheimers like to spread the money all over the country and there I was out in the, in the corn fields. So that's when I, [LAUGHTER] that's when I got one and I didn't need one by then. And then

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the American Institute and Academy of Arts and Letters gave me an award when I didn't need one and I bought a Boston Whaler with a 35-horsepower engine. [LAUGHTER] I don't know whether there is a creative writing course here or not. It's ordinarily a scandalous course for any university to offer because absolutely everybody flunks, as nobody comes out of such a course, er, practically nobody. Uh, no,

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practically nobody comes out a writer at the end. There is no way to produce a writer in that manner. But I have taught a fair amount of creative writing and I respect it. It's a little like being a golf professional: you can stand aside and see bonehead mistakes that people are making and, uh, correct them. Just tell them things are getting in the way of telling, of telling a story. And again, it's Aristotelian, mainly what you have to tell someone who’s making a bonehead mistake. I have-

[00:17:30]

How many of you here have written a short story or a novel which doesn't seem to be working? [AUDIENCE MURMUR] Well, all right, as I will, I will bring creative writing to Cornell in case it doesn't have it already, ‘cause I have this mentalist trick which I will do for you now.

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Ah. I think you should throw away the first six pages no matter what they are. [LAUGHTER] You'll have a very high energy beginning that way. It's gonna be thrilling! [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] Now what you've done with those first six pages if you’re a beginner, is, uh, said, introduced yourself and said, ‘you've never heard of me but really I'm a very nice person and I can, I can write extremely well, and I'm going to describe this windmill now, [LAUGHTER] and

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in a thunderstorm, and you'll see how well written that is, in the, and this whole book’s going to be full of good stuff like that so please, please keep going.’ [LAUGHTER] The reader doesn't care who you are. And will forget you the minute the book is done. All right. There's something else wrong with your story, I sense. [LAUGHTER]

[00:18:56]

You are one character short. [LAUGHTER] That character is Iago. [LAUGHTER] You need somebody who will behave abominably and in order to make otherwise listless characters really bounce around and, and [LAUGHTER] respond in vivid ways. So that the whole story will be exciting. Now let me warn you about Iago. When you put Iago into your story, this person who makes all the other characters react, you're going to want to explain why Iago is

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such a terrible person, that something happened in the childhood or whatever. The reader does not give a damn, is, [LAUGHTER] do not. The reader is so grateful, is having such a good time since Iago arrived. [KV LAUGHS] [LAUGHTER] All he wants to do is keep, keep Iago around. All right now, if you are going to write a novel and you can't get a fellowship, can't get a grant, can't get any of that, you have a capitalistic problem. How are you going to take care yourself, and possibly a family, for 3 years, or however long it takes to create this work of art? And I've thought a good deal about this, worried a lot about it, implications for our culture. Where are you going to get the money? Where are artists going to get the money? And I've seen what other people have done. So my principal recommendation is: you marry it. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE]

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Now this will ordinarily be a hell of a lot more money than the Guggenheims will give you. And it's generally withheld from popular discourse that this in fact is what Mark Twain did; is he built these gorgeous houses of his principally because he married a banker's daughter. He also lost all her money for her.

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And you know, it's not as hard to marry-, I don't mean this cynically. I'm really trying to help. [LAUGHTER] And I have seen so many people who've improved their condition through marriage. I would be foolish not, I would be derelict not to recommend it and it's even possible to marry a Guggenheim, if you- [LAUGHTER]

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Now, I don't, I don't assume that you're all thoroughly familiar with my work because my foot doctor thinks I wrote *Kon-Tiki*. [LAUGHTER] And my congressman thinks I wrote *The Clockwork Orange*. The most famous American writers today are Truman Capote, Gore Vidal, and Norman Mailer. The writers who appear most frequently on television are Truman Capote, Gore Vidal, and Norman Mailer.

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America has two living Nobel Prize winners in literature, and they are seldom discussed because they do not appear on television much. They are Saul Bellow and Isaac Singer. And Saul Bellow of course wrote *Kon-Tiki,* and [LAUGHTER] Isaac Singer wrote *The Clockwork Orange*. [LAUGHTER] The appearances of Capote and Vidal and Mailer on television

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had their equivalents in pre-television times. There’s Mark Twain, of course, who would travel around, make personal appearances as a talker rather than a writer, and at the end of his life he was greatly beloved as a talker and a superb vaudevillian. He, uh, would rehearse his speeches for hours before a mirror and edit himself as though he were television film. It was a very careful performance and, uh,

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when he went broke toward the end, as had terrible financial reverses, he did not sit down to write another book. He did what Willie Nelson does, he went out on the road. You all know what Mark Twain said about the opera, I'm sure. He said he hadn't heard anything like it since the orphanage burned down. [LAUGHTER]

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I have not rehearsed this speech before a mirror, I have however taken a course in public speaking at this very institution. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] And I was told then that the first rule of public speaking is: never apologize! And that remains the basic rule of public speaking to this very day. First rule, never apologize!

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Now when I heard that, I realized that with all the trained public speakers around, audiences hadn't heard an apology from a speaker for years probably, because all the speakers knew what the first rule was. So, I thought it might be refreshing to you if I apologize. [LAUGHTER] I am sorry. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE]

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I am utterly sick about the whole thing. [LAUGHTER] And, and, I’ll, I'll do my best to, to make it up to you someway. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] Writers tend not to live very long. I have already outlived D.H. Lawrence and F. Scott Fitzgerald and my particular hero, George Orwell. Next year, if I make it, I will catch up with Ernest Hemingway.

[00:26:02]

Sitting still for years and years and being all alone for years and years is very bad for people, I think, and depressing. I, teaching creative writing around the country, I’ve taught at Iowa, I’ve taught at City College, I’ve taught at Harvard. I have found, well I feel as-, you said it [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] [KV LAUGHS] I-

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No. They’re people like anybody else. It's, it’s just more humanity. I-, but anyway, in anywhere I've taught I have found, uh, literary talent extremely common. Uh, in a crowd this size, there are 53 people who, uh, could be professionals of the first rank if they were willing to sit still that long, to be alone that much, and, uh,

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I don't blame people for not wanting to do it. It seems-, I often feel about my own work sitting there at a typewriter that this is an insult to life, and I had a sister who was very gifted as a sculptor, and she could also draw very well, and as a little kid she could do it, adolescent, she, she did wonderful work. And as a grown up I would ask her, “Why don't you do more with this gift of yours?” and she said something which is highly intelligent, it's, “just because you're talented doesn't mean you have to do something with it ,” which is right.

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And the American scheme and I suppose the European scheme, we're just as good as they are now, is you’re supposed to grab a talent and run as far as fast as you can with it. And I used to think that Björn Borg was one of the most terrible persons who ever lived. He is now my hero since he quit tennis. He's,

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he decided he just didn't want to hit that ball anymore, no matter how much money there was in it, and this is wonderful as I love people who decide not to be in the Olympics. [LAUGHTER] After I die, and I've gone to the great bookmobile in the sky, [LAUGHTER]

[00:28:41]

I don't want to be remembered as a literate, as a writer. I want to be remembered as a, an inventor. I have invent-, made several important inventions, and I want credit for them while I'm still alive. One is the Kilgore Trout story. [APPLAUSE] One is ‘the man-woman hour,’ which I don't think I've published. [LAUGHTER]

[00:29:13]

One is analytic geometry applied to storytelling. And one is the government issue artificial extended family. And my most recent contribution, discovery, scientific discovery is a new disease which I will describe to you. Now then, I invented the man-woman hour after hearing people say, “Oh, yes, we've been happily married for 37 years.” “I had a love affair last summer.” “I had a love affair off and on for 3 years.” These people weren't telling me *anything* about the depth of this relationship and I was wondering how to refine their description of what the hell was really going on.

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So, I invented the man-woman hour. Now then, a man-woman hour is an hour that a man and woman spend together, paying some attention to each other. If my wife and I watch *Dallas,* anddiscuss the treachery of the characters on the show and so forth, that's a perfectly acceptable man-woman hour. [LAUGHTER]

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So, if we play ping-pong for 60 minutes, that's a man-woman hour. And we're together, we're aware of each other. Sleep does not count. [LAUGHTER] Okay. So, you can, you get the man-woman hour, and then I made up the ideal man-woman week in order that we can make comparisons. You can compare your life with the ideal couple which I described as if one or both are away at work today, uh, every day, so your ideal man-woman week is five hours a day during the five weekdays, ten hours on Saturday, ten hours on Sunday. ‘Cause the weekday is one hour at breakfast, four hours after supper. All right, so that gives us the ideal man-woman week; it’s 45 hours. Now then, if you work that up to the ideal man-woman year,

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it comes to 2,300 man-woman hours and change, and I have, I have rounded that off for, as two thou- as 2,000 man-woman hours. I say that people should be entitled to celebrate a wedding anniversary every time they’ve accumulated 2,000 man-woman hours. [LAUGHTER] Also, they *can't* celebrate one until they have accumulated 2,000 man-woman hours. Now you know there're going to be some couples

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that aren't going to get to celebrate their first wedding anniversary until they’ve been married for 17 years, but, [LAUGHTER] by-, they've gotta log those hours or no presents. [APPLAUSE] And the reason I exclude sleep from the calculation is we don't want anybody snoozing his or her way to a golden wedding anniversary, No fair; you gotta be awake! All right, so I, uh,

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some woman had a wonderful affair last spring with Pierre in Paris. Ask her how many man- woman hours this thing lasted, this wonderful thing she had. She could say about thirty-six, maybe. I say, “That count the time Pierre was asleep?” And she said, “No.” And so I say, “Subtract that,” you know, and it turned out she had a love affair that lasted two hours and a half. [LAUGHTER]

[00:33:05]

I am a vested interest in this case because my wife and I both work at home, and we put in, we put in more than twice the man-woman hours that the ideal couple does, and we're entitled to celebrating an anniversary every five months, and we fully intend to do so and, [LAUGHTER]

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be rewarded with the appropriate presents. [APPLAUSE] Another invention is a Kilgore Trout story. Now, Kilgore Trout is a fictitious science fiction writer, hideously underpaid and unappreciated, and I tell stories, I guess, he's written thousands of short stories and hundreds of novels all in paperback, and the stories are published in porn magazines to fill the spaces between the dirty pictures. Give redeeming social value to the dirty books, and-.

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But every so often in a book of mine, I will tell the plot of a Kilgore Trout novel, which is the only thing good about Kilgore Trout’s novels is the plot, and a plot I can tell in a hundred words or less. I got this idea from conversations I've had with people about science fiction novels, as I would describe one and then the person would describe one for me, and then I realized that most science fiction novels are much better if you tell them in a hundred words than if you read the whole damn thing. [APPLAUSE]

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And so I thought there were all these novels that really should be boiled down to a hundred words, that the reader shouldn't have to read the whole damn thing, and, and forests shouldn't be slain to provide the paper for the, for these things, and the author shouldn't go through the heartbreak of, of writing a whole novel when the only thing that's any good is the plot.

[00:35:02]

All right so I'll give you an example of a Kilgore Trout story. Well, one of his stories is about, uh, God decides to experiment with, - actually I'm an atheist, - uh, creator of the universe decides to experiment with a new sort of organism in the universe. Uh, it's going to have free will. It's going to have to decide what to do next.

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And all the creatures on the, on all the planets so far have, have been clocks, more or less, who have responded automatically to this stimulus or that one, and, and have never, uh, chosen between alternatives. And, uh, so the creator of the universe here on Earth creates one creature with free will and surrounds it with robots,

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to test this one creature, to see what it’ll do. And the robots all around it, uh, torment it in various ways: double cross it, disappoint it, fall in love with it, and fall out of love with it and,-. Uh, you sir, in the red sweater, would you please stand up? The rest of us are robots. [LAUGHTER]

[00:36:31]

The test is over. We're going to have a party for you tonight. You have behaved extraordinarily well. Have [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] performed far better than we expected, and we are sorry about the tears we have caused you. And, uh, you are utterly successful organism and there're going to be many such from now on. Congratulations. [APPLAUSE]

[00:37:06]

That’s Kilgore Trout’s story. Another one is about a planet. See, uh, why should I write a whole book about it? [LAUGHTER] [KV LAUGHS] Why should you read a whole book about it? Another Kilgore Trout story is about this planet where the, - you mustn't laugh at this, - where the people communicate by tap dancing and breaking wind. [LAUGHTER]

[00:37:43]

It’s no more ridic-, you just revealed how ethnocentric you are, it’s no more, it’s, it's no more ridiculous than what we do. Anyway, actually this idea came from an experience in my childhood. I told you about my mother trying to write her way out of the Depression. What's – [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. Well, there were other, other people who were hoping their kids would tap dance their way out of the, out of the Depression, and we lived next door to such a family, the Fairchilds. And they were giving little Bobby Fairchild, at great sacrifice, tap dancing lessons, in the hopes that he would become the new Shirley Temple. [LAUGHTER]

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And, so, they kept him under wraps for a while. We knew he was studying the dance, but we couldn't see any of it, and finally it was time for the neighbors, to invite the neighbors in to see what he could do. And so there little Bobby Fairchild was, just seven years old and they had him behind the draperies there in the dining room, and, and, and then they put on a Victrola record and Bobby came out. And he really was pretty good! And he had a top hat and he had, uh, patent leather shoes and he had a little cane with a white head on it and everything. And out he came!

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And he was tap dancing very well, but he was in such a high state of alarm that he was breaking wind at the same time. [LAUGHTER] And I just never forgot it. [LAUGHTER] [KV LAUGHS] And one thing about breaking wind while you tap dance is that you do it in time to the music. [LAUGHTER]

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Anyway, later I thought of this planet where people routinely conversed in this manner and had, had this Kilgore Trout story where it's a very peaceful planet, nice people, where they communicate that way. They send a flying saucer here to find out what's going on on this planet and they send this unarmed scout here, uh,

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bearing good will and he lands at night in Connecticut. And no sooner does he get out, and here's this beautiful colonial home with flames coming out through the roof and showing in the attic windows. And so he runs into the house to wake up everybody to warn them, to tell them to get out, [KV COUGHS] and he does this speaking his own language of course. [LAUGHTER]

[00:40:27]

And it's a story about a tragic failure to communicate [LAUGHTER] because the owner of the house kills him with a golf club. [LAUGHTER] Let's see whether I can project sufficiently. I have to work at the blackboard here. [PAUSE] [LAUGHTER] That's the G-I axis: good fortune/ill fortune. A very lucky person is at the very top, a very unlucky, unhappy person is at the very bottom. [LAUGHTER] [PAUSE]

[00:41:52]

I'm going to apply analytic geometry to a story, you realize. This horizontal axis, the B-E axis, B stands for beginning and E stands for electricity. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] Now then. I hate primitive people because they're so stupid. And, [LAUGHTER] but a primitive person telling a story would just have a story that goes right along the B-E axis.

[00:42:32]

An American, a dumb American Indian story would go, you know, we came to a mountain, we came to a river, Little Beaver died. And now [LAUGHTER] you can’t, nobody seems to give a damn what happens. It doesn't make any difference, you know, so you can't tell whether it's good or ill fortune. It just goes along and very tedious.

[00:42:55]

With our more highly developed nervous system, [LAUGHTER] we like stories with rise and fall to them. And one of our favorite stories, the technical name for it is “man in hole” and I will graph it for you. The person gets into trouble, gets out of trouble. That's it. [LAUGHTER] [PAUSE] These are not copyrighted incidentally.

## Part 2 of 2:

[00:00:02]

>> KV: -person has become proud of himself for having fallen into a hole and gotten out of it. The neighbors would say, “There's a person who got in the hole and got out of it.” You realize this is any sort of trouble. Okay, a slightly more complicated curve, more beautiful curve too, is boy gets girl, boy loses girl.

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And this is, doesn't have to be girl. A person gets something he likes a whole lot, loses it, gets it back. [Yelling from somewhere far from the microphone] Utterly average person on a day like any other day! [PAUSE] [LAUGHTER] [back to the microphone] All right, now I'm going to graph, I'm really going to have to project in a theater this size and, and do not worry about it, I'm perfectly capable of it. [LAUGHTER]

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Because I'm going to graph the most popular story in our civilization and you can sell it again and again and again and people will love it and love it and love it and will never stop loving it. It starts at the very bottom. There’s a very unhappy girl whose mother has died. [LAUGHTER]

[yelling far from the microphone] Her father has remarried! [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] Her father has remarried. There’s gonna be a big party at the prince’s house; she can’t go. [LAUGHTER] You’ve heard it?! She can’t go. Her new mother, her stepmother is a battle-axe and [LAUGHTER] and really rotten kids she’s got, too. Okay, so, fairy godmother comes and starts giving Cinderella property [UNINTELLIGIBLE] shoes, mascara, [LAUGHTER] everything you need for a party. [LAUGHTER] Property accumulation. [LAUGHTER] Goes to the party, has a swell time, right? Dances with the prince. Boing, boing, boing, boing. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] There’s a radical change in direction. Okay, she doesn’t drop down as low as she was at the beginning because she’s had a party, she’s had a swell time. So, she poops around at this level. Then the shoe fits. LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] Off scale! There’s one other instance where, where I go completely off scale in order to do, to do justice to a story. Let me show you something very interesting. Every creation myth starts this way. God gave us the sun. God gave us the moon. God gave us the corn. God gave us the salmon. [LAUGHTER] Whatever. Anybody’s creation myth. We are the only people to have God take it all away again. This is the Old Testament up to here, and this is the Christian hope for resurrection. And I believe that that is the bone deep reason that *Cinderella* will always be a popular story. I believe that! [APPLAUSE] All right, I told you there is one other instance of off scale. There is this man, there is this man who has the worst job in Prague, young man, no chance of promotion. He’s underpaid, the hours are terrible. He has very disagreeable relatives. There’s no chance he will ever know love in this life. He has no way to court anybody, has no friends. He wakes up one morning. He has turned into a cockroach! [APPLAUSE]

[at microphone] Now then, when I first started playing this thing, playing with this thing, I, I thought it was a parlor trick and that I was just a buffoon. And I used to myself anticipate what the objections to this scheme might be,

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that, no *great* work of art, no great literary work of art, could be graphed in this manner and I myself used to say so. I would say, “You cannot graph *Hamlet*.” But just a month ago I sat down, I started playing with this again and I said, “All right, by God. I'm going to try and graph *Hamlet*.”

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And I'm going to surprise you because I made an important discovery. Okay. Where does Hamlet start? He starts on the same level as Cinderella for almost the same reasons: there’s the death of a parent. [PAUSE] When he sees his father's ghost, is that good fortune or ill fortune? You can't tell. When he drives Ophelia away, is that good fortune or ill fortune? You can't tell.

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When he kills Polonius behind the drapes, is that good fortune or ill fortune? You can't tell. [LAUGHTER] Right? I'm telling you this seriously. When Hamlet himself dies, is this good fortune or ill fortune? [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE] Exactly as dumb as an American Indian. [LAUGHTER] Now then, this is our masterpiece. I think few people would argue with that; this is our greatest literary work.

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We love it. We recognize it as such. And I think that all this rise and fall, all those certainties about knowing what is good and bad, are pretensions. I think we pretend to recognize what is good and what is bad. I mean think of a child going to the circus, is a child, it is

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demanded of the child that the child love this. I'm persuaded every kid hated the circus as much as I did. Anyway, I think we are much relieved to have the truth told about life here as we perceive it: that we can't tell what is good and what is bad. And that's what Shakespeare says in *Hamlet* of himself: I can't tell what is good and what is bad; nonetheless life is quite marvelous. So that's what I've gotten out of it so far and ask me back in 5 years and maybe I will have turned something else up.

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There is a tragedy in this. We are immersed in stories, as you can go home after this speech and leave, turn the television on and you can, you can see ten stories before you go to sleep. And God knows how many thousands of stories we read or are told in the course of our lives. And this rise and fall I've told you, this people getting into trouble and getting out of it again, this is pleasing to us. Or finding something, losing it, and getting it back. This is pleasing to us. We love that rise and fall, and we come to expect it of stories and these curves are excellent just for storytellers. They have nothing to do with life, but we have heard so many stories that we imagine our lives should be like that too. And I'm persuaded that many marriages break up

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just because they don't seem to be like very good stories, as you know the kid is all right, I like the house, the sex is okay, but it really isn't much of a *story*, is it? There's no rise and fall, is couldn't one of us please get into trouble and get out of it again?

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Couldn't we find something we really like and lose it and get it back again? And so, people are deeply disappointed in their lives because they're not good stories, and I am persuaded that Ernest Hemingway was a victim of this, uh, mistake, believing life should be a story. He believed his life was a story, and he believed it was over, it should properly end when he could no longer write, no longer felt like writing, or perhaps he was not a great lover anymore and he punctuated himself and I don't, I mean this seriously, is that shotgun shell in his shotgun was a period. And it’s a very sad business, and I'm sure that there are many tragedies of that sort all the time, as people saying, “God, I’m a, I’m a wash out, I'm not much of a story.” ‘Cause I mean, the Indians are right and Hamlet is right, as there isn't any real rise and fall. Uh, I, [APPLAUSE]

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All right, the, another my great inventions is a government issue artificial extended family. Loneliness is a basic American disease, or was before herpes, I guess. [LAUGHTER] I felt, I, I think that when we left our homelands to settle in this new continent, we left our families behind and this has cost us more than we know, left us far lonelier than most people in the world are. We do not have enough friends and relatives

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to support us in small matters and occasionally in large matters. As in Nigeria, for example, it's quite ordinary to have a thousand relatives. If you have an extended family, if you have lots of relatives around you, and you have a kid who can't stand you, or you have a kid that you can't stand, is that kid can go off and move in with, with some relatives who are more congenial. Is, uh, is, uh, I mean, this is what happens in, in areas where, where they have extended families. And these people can come to your support, and help you in all sorts of ways, as take care of the baby for a couple of weeks while you're sick or whatever. We're, we’re, we’re all alone or just have a couple of associates, usually a mate. And so, I want the government to remedy this immediately and this is a social reform which will cost absolutely nothing, or very little, because all the machinery is in place. As the Social Security Administration already has, uh, has most of our names and addresses and has the computers. I want them to issue us artificial relatives chosen at random.

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Get a letter in the mail saying: from now on you are to use the middle name Raspberry 14. Or Squirrel 3, or Peanut 6, or whatever. You also get a little phonebook. Little directory of all your relatives. Now if you’re a Raspberry 16, there’ll be a thousand people in this country which is what a Nigerian gets in the way of relatives, ‘cause why should we do any worse?

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All with a middle name Raspberry 16! Now there are also Raspberry 1, Raspberry 2, Raspberry 3, and so forth families through 20, and anybody with Raspberry in his middle name is a member of your clan. [LAUGHTER] Now you are entitled to approach these people. If you are moved from San Diego to Bangor, Maine, and you have to buy property there in a hurry or rent an apartment or whatever, you could look in your directory, and by God, there are not one, but two Raspberry 17's in Bangor. And you can call one of ‘em up and say, you know, “How much rent should I pay? How much rent is other people, are other people paying?” or “Can you, I've got a to toothache. Can you tell me who, who a good dentist is?” You can approach these people. Is we don't dare approach anybody now for fear of getting killed, I mean. [LAUGHTER]

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You ask for small favors, ‘cause now, because nobody has enough relatives. because nobody has any relatives, people call the police department for everything, occasionally, in special cases, the fire department. And I don't blame the government for thinking that Americans want too many services from the government. But we do not have the extended families which ordinarily perform all these

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comforting social functions. And, uh, with an extended family you can take care of lunatics often better than the government can do it. Anyway, the government would not require you to treat these new relatives of yours any better than the treat, you treat the relatives you've got now. If somebody calls up and says, “Hi. I'm a Raspberry 17. Can you lend me $15 ‘til next Tuesday?” You can just simply hang up. This is what you do, what you might do to your brother anyway. [LAUGHTER] It just gives us an excuse to approach each other. It would take care of the race problem immediately, because these artificial families would seem like races to us, as our minds will make races out of anything, and pretty soon you will hear, you know, is that “Turtle 17's are a rotten bunch and I would never have-.” [LAUGHTER]

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“The Squirrel 3’s are nice people and I like them, but never let ‘em close to money.” [LAUGHTER] [KV LAUGHS] “Why, why are so many Daffodils gay?” [LAUGHTER] And you'll feel closer to your, as close to your artificial relatives after a couple of years go by as you would to your real ones, which might often be not close at all. Anyway, this would cost nothing. I think it would be elating to everyone. Now then, I have discovered a new disease, as though I hadn't already done enough. [LAUGHTER]

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And I have to reason this very closely so there be very little eye contact on this. And it starts out very slow but it picks up. It really does start out terribly slow. What is America's greatest contribution to the culture of this planet been? Many people would say jazz. I will say Alcoholics Anonymous.

[00:18:57]

Not funny? Alcoholics Anonymous is the first scheme to deal successfully with the tragic mysteries of addiction, addiction not simply to alcohol, but all sorts of chemicals which can give pleasure briefly, but which in the long term can turn the lives of addicts and those around them, into hell. The Alcoholics Anonymous’ scheme which will work only if an addict will admit regularly that this or that chemical is poison to him, is now proving its effectiveness with compulsive gamblers who do not swallow pleasure-giving chemicals or sniff them or inject them into their veins. Compulsive gamblers generate bad chemicals inside themselves when the cards are dealt, or the dice are rattled, or the wheel is spun. Compulsive gamblers have learned to be their own producers of what are for them, bad, dangerous substances. At a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous the member’s expected to introduce himself in this manner: “My name is so-and-so and I'm an alcoholic.” At a meeting of Gamblers Anonymous, the members are expected to stand up and introduce himself in this manner as, “I am so-and-so and I'm a compulsive gambler.” Members are encouraged to testify at meetings as to how the chemicals they swallowed or generated within themselves alienated their friends and relatives, lost them jobs and houses, deprived them of their last shreds of dignity. Not every member has sunk quite that low, of course.

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But many have. Many if not most members have done what they call “hitting bottom” before seeking help, before admitting what it is that has been ruining their lives for so long. I wish to call attention to another dangerous form of addiction which has not previously been identified as such. It is like chemical, it is like compulsive gambling since the afflicted person seeks situations which will cause his body to release certain exciting chemicals into his bloodstream. We should recognize that there are among us persons who are tragically hooked on preparations for war.

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Not war itself, but preparations for war. Tell them that a war is coming, and that we have to get ready for it, and for a little while they are as happy as an alcoholic who has just had three martinis for breakfast. Let us recognize how sick these people are and stop encouraging them when they satisfy their craving. From now on when a national leader or even just a neighbor starts talking about some new weapons system which is going to cost eleven trillion dollars we should speak up.

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We should say something on the order of, “Honest to God, I couldn't be sorrier for you if I'd watched you wash down a handful of amphetamines with a pint of Southern Comfort.” [APPLAUSE] I mean it. I am not joking. Compulsive preparers for WWIII are as tragically, yes, and as repulsively addicted as any wino passed out in the toilet stall in the Port Authority Bus Terminal. [APPLAUSE]

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For an alcoholic to experience a few moments of happiness he needs maybe $3 worth of grain alcohol. For a compulsive gambler to experience a few moments of happiness he needs only a few dollars to risk at a table. But for a person addicted to preparations for war to experience a few moments of fleeting happiness, we may have to buy him a trident submarine.

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If Western civilization, which blankets most of the world now and includes the Soviet Union, if Western civilization were a person, we should be directing that person to the nearest meeting of War Preparers Anonymous. We should be telling it to stand up before the meeting and say, “My name is Western Civilization. I am a compulsive war preparer. I have lost everything I ever cared about. I should have come here long before. I first hit bottom in WWI.” [APPLAUSE]

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I am serious. Western civilization can't be represented by a single person, but a single explanation for the disastrous course it has followed in this bloody century is possible. We the people have again and again mistaken for great leaders very sick persons, compulsive preparers for war. [APPLAUSE] If we the people stop making this tragic mistake and perhaps set up treatment centers for the addicts who have ruined us, then Western civilization's long hard trip back to permanent sobriety can begin.

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Appeasement. That is something the war preparers say we are never to engage in, or something terrible will happen to us. But everywhere I look I see appeasement going on: North and South America, on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Who is being appeased? Communists, Neo-Nazis? No, it is the compulsive preparers for war. I can scarcely name a nation now which has not lost most of its freedom and wealth in trying to appease its own addicts to preparations for war. And there is no appeasing an addict for very long. “Honest to God, man. Just give me enough money for a few multiple reentry vehicles and a fleet of B-1 [LAUGHTER]

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and a fleet of B-1 bombers and I'll never bother you again.” Most addictions start innocently enough, in childhood, I think, under agreeable, reputable auspices: a sip of champagne at a wedding, game of poker for matchsticks on a rainy afternoon, parents approve. Addicts of war preparation may have been encouraged when babies to clap their hands at a 4th of July parade.

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Not everybody gets hooked. Not every child who gets a cap gun in his Christmas stocking is going to be saying later that the only way for us to be happy and safe is to knock down incoming missiles with laser beams. [APPLAUSE] Not every child who sees his father shoot quail on a crisp autumn morning is later going to tell us that we must stop squandering money on education and public health and food and shelter and clothing [LAUGHTER]

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in order that we can protect our way of life with invincible weaponry. Please note, I am talking about an addiction to preparations for war: to parades, and test firings, and ship christenings, and planning of secret strategies and so on. I'm not talking about addiction to war itself, which is a very different matter. A compulsive preparer for war no more wants to go to war than an alcoholic wants to wake up in a toilet stall in the Port Authority Bus Terminal. [LAUGHTER]

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Should addicts of any sort hold high office in this or any other country? Absolutely not. [APPLAUSE] The first priority of an addict is always going to be to satisfy his addiction, no matter how terrible the consequences may be, even to himself. Suppose we had an alcoholic president who still had not hit bottom and whose chief companions were drunks like himself.

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And suppose it were made a, suppose it were a fact made absolutely clear to him that if he took one more drink the whole planet would blow up. So, he has all the liquor thrown out of the White House including his aftershave lotion. So late that night he is terribly restless, crazy for a drink, but proud of not drinking. So, he opens the White House refrigerator looking for a Tab or a Diet Pepsi, he tells himself, and there, half-hidden behind a family-sized jar of French's mustard,

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is an unopened can of Budweiser. What do you think he'll do? That's the end of my speech. [APPLAUSE]