



# The Utah Humanist

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**H**umanists of Utah is a Chapter of the *American Humanist Association*.

We are a nonprofit corporation organized to advocate and promote ethical, rational, and democratic humanism among our membership and the larger community.



**Humanism** is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. It affirms the dignity of each human being and supports individual liberty consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates participatory democracy, the open society, human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

—*The Humanist*,  
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## Kurt Vonnegut, Jr

Kurt Vonnegut, 1922-2007, has been one of my personal heroes since I discovered his work. Sometime in 1974 I was discussing life with a bartender when he asked me if I was familiar with Vonnegut, I was not. He told me about play that was showing and recommended that I see it. The show was *Happy Birthday Wanda June* by Kurt Vonnegut. I was enthralled. I went to the book store and purchased *Player Piano*, *Mother Night*, *Siren's of Titan*, etc. etc. My personal library now has quite a few first edition hardcover and other special editions of Vonnegut's writings.

This is also about the time that I discovered humanism and joined Humanists of Utah. Kurt Vonnegut was the Honorary President of the American Humanist Association at the time. I was actually thrilled when I got my first mail from the AHA, the return address was under the name: Kurt Vonnegut!! My first HoU summer picnic was a potluck luncheon attended by maybe a dozen people. For my food contribution, since the picnic was held on my own birthday, I went to a bakery and bought a birthday cake decorated with the phrase, "Happy Birthday Wanda June." In the play Wanda June's role is that of a little girl who was hit and killed by a car the day before her birthday. The cake, which had it's price discounted because the family did not pick it up, was purchased by one of the actual characters in the play who was returning to his dysfunctional family after may years on Safari Hunts in Africa. A lot of Vonnegut plots can be described as "dysfunctional."

Sometime in the early 1990s, I was made aware a Kickstarter (fund raiser) to bank roll a biographical film about Vonnegut. I donated with a promise of a DVD and listing my name in the movie credits. Fast forward 40 years or so and that Documentary, *Unstuck in Time*, has been released to movie theaters and streaming on Amazon Prime. There is no chance

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# Jailbird

## ~Book Review~

When Kurt Vonnegut died a couple of months ago, I decided to reread some of his novels. Some kind of serendipity kicked in when I chose *Jailbird*. You see, I'm 56 years old and Vonnegut begins the book pointing out that he was 56 at the time he wrote the novel. Furthermore, the genesis for the thematic ideas was a luncheon he had with, among others, his father when the senior Vonnegut was 56. In fact, numbers are so important in this work that they are all spelled out, even years such as this is Two Thousand Seven.

Walter F. Starbuck, the protagonist of the story, lives a rags, to riches, to jail, to rags, to riches, to jail life. As a young boy and son of a chauffeur to a rich industrialist, Starbuck witnesses the beginnings of the labor movement and the injustices suffered by working people. However, as a favorite of one of the company owners, he earns himself a scholarship to Harvard. Is there really anyone more important than a Harvard alumnus?

After graduating from Harvard, Starbuck secures a position at the White House as the advisor on Student Affairs to President Richard Nixon. His office is in the basement and virtually forgotten by everyone in the executive branch. However, after the Watergate break in, some illicit funds are secreted away in his office which are found by the authorities. Hence, it is off to prison for Walter.

After his release he accidentally comes across one of the four women that he ever really loved. She doesn't look like much now, but she has a huge secret that ends up giving Starbuck great wealth and power. Will he be able to hold it?

This novel is a vehicle to Vonnegut's belief that every human has value. The true life story of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants that were executed by the state on trumped up murder charges, is presented in detail. What they were guilty of was organizing the labor movement. However, they were killed in an electric chair along with a third criminal who,

# President's Message

## Happy Holidays and Seasons Greetings!

My hope is that this newsletter finds you well, safe, and happy. While we all embark on the end of this current year, this is a time of reflection, celebration, hope and promise for the future. Even though, we are still in the throes of much turmoil with the pandemic, political issues, community issues and personal struggles, there is so much to be hopeful for. There is good news all around us for us to work with, surround ourselves with, plug into and participate with. As humanists, we do not embrace the traditional holiday affairs which are centered around religious ideology. But this season is not exclusive to these beliefs. There are many holidays and celebrations to be had worldwide and personally that are fully encompassed with this time of year. There is a general sense of gratitude, community connectedness, service and love now that is heightened. Find what makes you happy, go toward what calls to you, reach out within your levels of safety and comfort for connection and know that we, in this group, care and are here. This month is our HumanLight celebration. We will be doing it remotely. You will receive emails with the worksheet and friendly reminders. It is a wonderful way to connect and is family friendly. We hope for the time when we can get back to meeting in person again, but we do not know when that will be - so we will be doing more events online and providing awesome content for you all to enjoy.

Happy holidays to you all and the very best wishes from me and the rest of your Board for the ending to 2021.

*Kindest regards  
Melanie White-Curtis*

at the last minute, confessed to the murder they stood accused of.

This is a bitter-sweet story that is very typical of the Vonnegut genre.

*-Wayne Wilson*



# Chaplain's Corner

## DIY Holiday

All of us do holidays in our own special way... we have family and personal traditions when it comes to what we serve at a meal or how we decorate a Christmas tree, or who performs which tasks.

One fascinating insight from history is that holidays are combined and personalized across centuries and cultures as well. For example, for Christians Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus, but it's name comes from the pagan Ostara. Jesus died during the Jewish festival of Passover, which commemorated the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, which in turn originated as a Spring festival related to the birth of the season's lambs.

Similarly, Christmas supposedly celebrates Jesus' birth, though we don't know when he was born (though historians are quite sure he was born in Nazareth, not Bethlehem), though it may have been during the spring. Who was born December 25? Mithras, an originally Persian God as worshipped by the Romans. December 25 is also time to celebrate the time when days lengthen after the winter solstice, when light overcomes the darkness. Sol Invictus. The "unconquered son" was celebrated on December 25 and associated with the Persian God Mithra. And many of our current Christmas traditions come from the Nordic celebration of Yule. See how that works?

Most holidays celebrate the shifting of seasons and the flow of life, especially in temperate climates when summer is bright and hot and winter is dark and cold. Agricultural life has its patterns--birth and planting in the spring, work in the summer, harvest in the fall in preparation for the challenges of winter. Celebrating these milestones help encourage groups to work and especially to cooperate. As a bonus, many of the celebrations are fun! Unless you are dinner.

What does this have to do with Humanism? We don't tend to believe in Santa or even Jesus Christ, but our disbelief in traditional mythology

need to diminish our appreciation for the holiday season. This month I want to celebrate HumanLight with you, while also encouraging you to develop your own holidays and rituals.

HumanLight is a made up holiday made up later than the other made up holidays. The New Jersey Humanists founded the holiday in 2001, and it was adopted by the American Humanist Association in 2004. HumanLight celebrates Humanist values such as reason, compassion, and hope. In honor of the theme of light in darkness, our HumanLight focus is going to be Grief, Gratitude, and Growth.

We need to honor each of these to process our feelings and show up to life in healthy ways. We are often tempted to take shortcuts and avoid pain and challenge, but we know we can't. One invitation from Covid-19 is that has shown us many truths. Many of these truths are unpleasant, such as the actual views of our family members, but Covid has also highlighted the power of science, the preciousness of relationships, and the fragility of the status quo. Covid has shown us both darkness and light, and both the limits and power of humanity.

This December 9th, we will gather together, apart, to grieve what we have lost and regret, to express gratitude for all we have, and to both celebrate and set intention for present and future growth.

—Chaplain Jared Anderson





# Vonnegut Memorial

# What is a Humanist?

*(Continued from page 1)*

that I will get the DVD as I have moved, probably twice, and changed my email address, again probably twice, but my name is in the second-to-last line of the credits! A website for the project also lists my name and has a link “to my website,” which I entered so long ago, as [humanistsofutah.org](http://humanistsofutah.org).

“Unstuck in Time” is part of the opening sentence of *Slaughterhouse 5, or the Children's Crusade*. It is among the boldest and clearest pacifistic arguments ever made. Vonnegut served in Europe during World War II and was captured by the Nazis and imprisoned in a hog slaughterhouse outside of Dresden during the Allied Fire Bombing of that city. He spent many weeks pulling dead bodies out of basements after the attack. The subtitle makes the point that most of the soldiers were, and still are, children. The so-called Children's Crusade of 1212 CE, was a movement of two armies of perhaps 20,000 children. They had no money for transport and many were sold into slavery. Many Vonnegut fans who already know this will also know that the last line of the novel is, “One bird said to Billy Pilgrim, ‘Poo-tee-weet?’” The documentary features a small animated bluebird, sometimes just a black and white drawing, of a bird that hops around and poo-tee-weets.

I am dedicating this newsletter to the memory of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. and filling it with book reviews of his work from our website published over the years. Not all of the reports will fit in this printed newsletter but they are all on our website.

—Wayne Wilson



## Do you know what a humanist is?

My parents and grandparents were humanists, what used to be called Free Thinkers. So as a humanist I am honoring my ancestors, which the Bible says is a good thing to do. We humanists try to behave as decently, as fairly, and as honorable as we can with any expectation of rewards or punishments in an afterlife. My father and sister didn't think there was one, my parents and grandparents didn't think there was one. It was enough that they were alive. We humanists serve as best we can with only abstraction with which we have any real familiarity which is our community.

I am, incidentally, Honorary President of the American Humanist association, having succeeded the late, great science fiction writer Isaac Asimov in that totally functionless capacity. We had a memorial service for Isaac a few years back, and I spoke and said at one point, “Isaac is up in heaven now.” It was the funniest thing I could have said to an audience of humanists. I rolled them in the aisles. It was several minutes before order could be restored. And if I should ever die, God forbid, I hope you will say, “Kurt is up in heaven now.” That's my favorite joke.

How do humanists feel about Jesus? I say of Jesus, as all humanists do, “If what he said is good, and so much of it is absolutely beautiful, what does it matter if he was God or not?”

—Kurt Vonnegut  
A Man without a Country



**H**umanists of Utah meetings are open to the public and free of any admission charge. A discussion and light refreshments follow the speaker's presentation. Come join us and **bring a friend!**

**D**isclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Humanists of Utah nor the American Humanist Association. Reprinting of articles is permitted for humanist groups promoting the interests of humanism if attribution is properly stated.



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>> Put Your Name Here <<  
>> Write an Article! <<

# Vonnegut Content

I am a little surprised at the selection of Vonnegut's work that has been reviewed in our newsletter over the years. It leaves out most his most famous and well read novels:

*Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, Cat's Cradle, Mother Night, Slaughterhouse Five, Breakfast of Champions, Deadeye Dick, Galapagos, and Bluebeard.*

Here is a list of linked articles (click to be taken to the review on our website)

- [God Bless You Mr. Rosewater; or Pearls Before Swine](#)
- [Slapstick; or Lonesome no More](#)
- [Jailbird](#)
- [Hocus Pocus](#)
- [Timequake](#)
- [God Bless You Dr. Kevorkian](#)

—Wayne Wilson

## Membership/Renewal Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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- \$50 Regular Annual Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
- \$90 Regular 2-year Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
- \$35 Regular Annual Membership with email delivery of the Utah Humanist
- \$65 Regular 2-year Membership with email delivery of the Utah Humanist
- \$20 Student Annual Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
- \$20 Annual subscription to the Utah Humanist (I do not want to be listed as a member of **Humanists of Utah**)
- Please send a *FREE* trial Subscription to the Utah Humanist
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ additional contribution to help promote public awareness of humanism
- ⇒ All contributions in excess of the \$20 subscription fee tax deductible.
- ⇒ *Members* have the right to vote in Chapter elections and participate in Chapter decisions.
- ⇒ Dues provide for information packets, honoraria to speakers, expenses of newsletter publication, trial subscriptions, copies to libraries, and newsletter exchange with other chapters.

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**Now you can pay online with PayPal!**

## Notes:

- ◆ *General Meetings* are for all members and the general public. There are no admission charges.
- ◆ *Discussion Group* meetings are open to everyone. A different book or topic is covered every month.
- ◆ *Board Meetings* are planning and business sessions. They are open to all members.
- ◆ Eliot Hall is in the First Unitarian Church located at 569 South 1300 East in Salt Lake City.
- ◆ RE 201 is upstairs in the East Educational Building at the First Unitarian Church.

## Charitable Giving While You Shop

### Amazon.com

Sign up for Amazon Smile and a percentage of your purchase will be donated to HoU:

- Log into amazon.com and open your personal account settings.
- Select “Your Amazon Smile.”
- Search for “Humanists of Utah.”

This will find “American Humanist Association” in West Jordan because we use the AHA as our umbrella for sales tax exemption.

- Click the “Select” button.

If you have a bookmark for Amazon please modify it to go to smile.amazon.com—you always want to use the “smile” option.



### Smith's Grocery Stores

Humanists of Utah is enrolled in Smith's Inspiring Donations program. If you have a Smith's Fresh Value card, you can register it to benefit Humanists of Utah. Simply visit [www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire](http://www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire), create an account, associate it with your Fresh Values card number, and then enter NPO Number: KQ330 within your “account summary.” All future purchases will now benefit HoU.



All Public in person  
meetings are CANCELLED  
again until further notice  
Due to the Pandemic



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*A Chapter of the American Humanist Association*

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