

Kurt Vonnegut Transcript

[Opening Music]

Susan Neville: Hello, and welcome to Naptown. I'm your host, Susan Neville, and our guest for this initial series of interviews is writer Dan Wakefield. Mr. Wakefield is the author of nine non-fiction books, two memoirs, five novels, including the best-selling *Going All the Way*.

Bill Moyers called Dan's memoir, *Returning, A Spiritual Journey*, "One of the most important memoirs of the spirit I've ever read." In his book *Island in the City: The World of Spanish Harlem*, James Baldwin wrote, "Dan Wakefield is a remarkable combination of humility and tough mindedness, it makes these streets and these struggling people come alive."

Over the next few episodes, we'll be talking to Mr. Wakefield about his life, including his deep friendships with writers such as Baldwin, Anne Sexton, Joan Didion, and Kurt Vonnegut, and his interviews as a staff writer for *The Nation*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New York Times*, and other newspapers and magazines, with such luminaries as Bobby Kennedy, C. Wright Mills, Dorothy Day, Adam Clayton Powell, Joan Baez, and Golda Meir, some of whom became good friends.

Again, I'm your host, Susan Neville, welcome Mr. Wakefield back to Naptown.

[Transitional Music]

Dan Wakefield: *Kurt Vonnegut, Christ-Loving Atheist*

When I came home from King's Chapel on the Sunday, I published an article called "Returning to Church" in the New York Times magazine in 1985 I had a message from Kurt Vonnegut on my answering machine, "This is Kurt," his voice said. "I forgive you." My becoming a Christian again in mid-life after many years of post-collegiate atheism and Vonnegut's humanist views became a running and always good-natured series of jibes between us.

Several decades after his message of forgiveness, I saw a poem Kurt published in the New Yorker and I fired off a postcard to him, a self-proclaimed Luddite he scorned computers and email. My postcard said, "I see you have become a poet. I

forgive you." Almost by return mail, I've got back a postcard from Kurt that said, "Not as bad as you becoming a Christian."

Kurt was proud of coming from a long line of German freethinkers. His great-grandfather Clemens Vonnegut founded the Freethinkers Society of Indianapolis. And Kurt was named an honorary president of the Humanist Association. He explained in his novel *Timequake* that humanists try to behave decently and honorably without any expectation of rewards or punishments in an afterlife. The creator of the universe has been to us unknowable so far, we serve as well as we can the highest abstraction of which we have some understanding which is our community. If it turned out there was an afterlife, Kurt reserved places in it for people he cared about, including his first wife Jane and his long-time publisher Seymour Lawrence who he said "saved me from smithereens" by publishing his novel the three former publishers had turned down, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. And bringing his former books in the standardized new editions.

Kurt loved to tell the story of how he let his heavenly sentiment slip before the wrong audience while delivering a eulogy for his predecessor as president of the Humanist Society, the science fiction writer Isaac Asimov. Kurt said, "I was sure that Isaac must be in heaven now," he told me once with the smoky laugh and a cough. He elaborated on his lapse in *Timequake* adding "That was the funniest thing I could have said to an audience of humanists. I rolled them in the aisles."

That I had become a Christian in the largely humanist Unitarian Universalist Association, King's Chapel in Boston is one of the few Christian churches in the UUA, provided Kurt with an added source of amusement. In 2003, he sent me one of his silk-screen drawings inscribed, "Dear Dan Wakefield, Unitarian Universalist fanatic." Kurt told a General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association that in order not to seem as spiritual paraplegic to strangers trying to get a fix on me, I sometimes say I'm a Unitarian Universalist. He also described himself as a Christ-loving atheist in that same talk and in the Palm Sunday sermon he gave the St. Clement's Episcopal Church in New York City in 1980, he said he was a Christ-worshipping agnostic. He belonged to no church, however, and made it clear that he was not a Christian.

In a letter to his daughter Nanny, September 8th, 1979, regarding the wedding plans for his second marriage, he wrote, "It will be as secular as I can make it since I am not a Christian of any kind but it will take place in a church because

churches are so beautiful and holy." He wrote Dan Farber, his long-time friend, lawyer, and executor of his estate in September of 1999, that "I am not, nor have I ever been a Christian, so I should not be given a funeral or memorial service, any sort of Christian supervision or in any Christian space."

I was inspired when I heard that a graduate of my high school in Indianapolis had stories in the Saturday Evening Post, one of the popular "slick" weekly magazines of the fifties, a literary Valhalla where giants like F. Scott Fitzgerald had published. This writer named Vonnegut had written for our high school paper, The Shortridge Daily Echo, ten years before I did, which gave me hope. I went to the barbershop to search for his stories in magazines and eagerly read his novels when they started to appear, feeling a kinship with his humor and his conversational style.

I first met Vonnegut in 1963 while I was on a Neiman Fellowship at Harvard and a mutual friend in Cambridge invited me to dinner with Kurt and his wife Jane, who were living on Cape Cod. Kurt was a tall, shaggy, friendly man, and in the laughter-filled conversation at the table with eight guests, he and I didn't talk about writing. We talked about high school. Our bond was that we both were failures at high school sports— we could laugh about it then, decades later.

My agent sent the manuscript of my first novel going all the way to ten publishers, including Vonnegut's publisher Seymour Lawrence. Sam Lawrence sent it to Kurt for his assessment, and a few days later called me to read the telegram of response, "You must publish this important novel; get this boy in our stable." I thought of Kurt as the godfather of my 1970 novel and he became a friend and mentor for life. We read and— in his one phrase— "boomed each other's books." We had lunches at Jake Wirth's German restaurant in Boston and assorted spots in midtown Manhattan after he moved to New York, often going back to his house to make phone calls to friends— surprising old friends with calls was a favorite pastime of Kurt. Out of the blue, he loved to tell dumb jokes, and when plans went awry his comment was, "Well, just another Indiana catastrophe story."

A year before his death in 2007 he came to a talk I gave at Saint Bart's Episcopal Church and invited me to dinner across the street at the bar of the Waldorf. When two of his fans approached our table to ask if he was "the real Kurt Vonnegut" he diverted them to talk about my new book. That was indeed "the real Kurt Vonnegut."

In Boston in the sixties, I began to see college students carrying dog-eared copies of Vonnegut's books and quoting from them to friends. He was gaining an underground audience for his quirky, irreverent wit, his questioning of accepted wisdom, and his fresh ways of looking at the world. Because of his appeal to youth, Vonnegut was sometimes called a counterculture hero, but the label was countered to his real message. He scorned the easy answer and the quick fix, and wrote a scathing piece on the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, guru to the stars, called *Yes, We Have No Nirvanas*. After hearing the guru give a talk on Transcendental Meditation in a Cambridge Massachusetts hotel ballroom, Vonnegut wrote, "I went outside the hotel, liking Jesus better than I had ever liked Him before. I wanted to see a crucifix, so I could say to it, 'You know why you're up there? It's Your own fault. You should have practiced Transcendental Meditation, which is easy as pie. You would also have been a better carpenter.'"

Vonnegut's survival of the fire-bombing of Dresden as a prisoner of war in an underground meat locker during World War Two gave a dark cast to his satire and inspired his great novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*. He scrapped conventional forms of narrative and made Billy Pilgrim, his hero, "come unstuck in time," traveling to different times and places in his life, Dresden, Indianapolis, Schenectady, Cape Cod, and "the planet Tralfamadore." The refrain "So it goes," said whenever a character dies in the novel, became a kind of brand and tagline for a sort of casual dismissal, missing the explanation of its meaning.

Billy Pilgrim says the most important thing he learned on the planet Tralfamadore was that, "When a person dies he only appears to die. He is still very much alive in the past, present and future, always has existed, always will exist". When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in that particular moment, but that the person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what The Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is "so it goes."

Despite his freethinker humanist views, no other American novelist of the post-World War II era expressed such a fascination with Jesus, nor referred to him as often in his work, both fiction and nonfiction, as Kurt Vonnegut. Except for John Updike, a confessed Christian, and James Baldwin, who had been a junior minister at a Pentecostal church as a boy in Harlem, it is hard to think of any other leading writer of the era who mentioned Jesus at all, except as a curse word. Baldwin told me that one of the publishers who rejected his autobiographical first novel, said they'd be willing to publish the book "if I took out the 'Jesus stuff.'"

When *Go Tell It on the Mountain* was published in 1953, it included the "Jesus stuff."

Vonnegut's initial fascination with Jesus began when his Uncle Alex introduced him to Powers Hapgood, a fellow Harvard grad and nationally known labor organizer who came from a wealthy Indianapolis family. Kurt, who thought he might try to work for a labor union after he got out of the army, describes the lunch with his father, Uncle Alex, and Hapgood in July of 1945, in an autobiographical prologue to his 1979 novel *Jailbird*. Hapgood, who had led picketers protesting the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, fought with United Mine Workers organizers who he thought were too right-wing, and he later was jailed for his role as a CIO strike organizer, had been in court that morning, testifying about violence on a picket line some months before. Describing that morning's time in court Hapgood told the Vonneguts that the judge asked him, "Why would a man from such a distinguished family and with such a fine education choose to live as you do?"

"Why?" Hapgood said he answered. "Why? Because of the Sermon on the Mount, sir."

The Sermon on the Mount became a kind of keystone in Vonnegut's talks, and pops up in novels and essays as well. In his Palm Sunday sermon at Saint Clements he told the congregation, "I am enchanted by the Sermon on the Mount. Being merciful, it seems to me, is the only good idea we have received so far. Perhaps we will get another idea that good by and by— and then we will have two good ideas."

In his book of essays *The Man without a Country*, Vonnegut wrote that, "For some reason the most vocal Christians among us never mention the Beatitudes. But often, with tears in their eyes, they demand that the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings. And of course that's Moses, not Jesus. I haven't heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere."

Next to the Sermon on the Mount, the words Vonnegut quotes most often in his work were spoken by his fellow Hoosier, Eugene V. Debs, while running for president on the Socialist Party ticket, "While there is a lower class I am in it. While there is a criminal element I am of it. While there is a soul in prison I am not free."

In his novel *Timequake*, Vonnegut called those words "a moving echo of the Sermon on the Mount." He quoted those words as an epigraph to his novel *Hocus Pocus*, which he dedicated to the memory of Debs, "a Socialist and a Pacifist and a labor organizer."

Vonnegut found another "echo of the Sermon on the Mount" in the work of Mark Twain. In a talk he gave on the hundredth anniversary of the completion of Mark Twain's fanciful house in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1979. Vonnegut declared himself a skeptic of the divinity of Christ, "confirmed of my skepticism by Mark Twain in my formative years". He wrote. He then cited a quote of the author as "a profoundly Christian statement, an echo of the Beatitudes."

Mark Twain wrote, "When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography, I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before— met him on the river." The river, of course, is life. Mark Twain is saying what Christ said in so many ways that he could not help loving anyone in the midst of life.

The idea of mercy came up in Kurt's conversation as well as in his work. He told me several times that Karl Marx's famous line that "religion is the opiate of the people" was usually misunderstood. He said, "Marx wasn't putting down religion when he said that. He meant that in the era when rich people used opium to ease their pain and poor people couldn't afford it, they needed something that would make them feel better, and religious belief really did that."

Kurt felt that was "merciful," and though he declared himself "a scorner of the notion that there is a God who cares how we are or what we do," he honored the role of religion in the life of believers. He said, "My great war buddy Bernard V. O'Hare, now dead, lost his faith as a Roman Catholic in World War Two." Vonnegut wrote that in *Timequake*. "I didn't like that." He wrote. "I thought that was too much to lose. I knew Bernie had lost something important and honorable."

In his 1999 commencement address to Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, Vonnegut told the graduates, "His, Jesus', greatest legacy to us, in my humble opinion, consists of only twelve words. They are the antidote to the Code of Hammurabi, a formula almost as compact as Albert Einstein's $E = mc^2$. Jesus of Nazareth told us to say these twelve words when we prayed, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." And for

those twelve words alone, he deserves to be called "the Prince of Peace." And how does Vonnegut reconcile his appreciation of Jesus and his message with his humanist beliefs that derived from the freethinking tradition of his ancestors?

This is how he explains it to the graduates of Agnes Scott College, "Some of you may know that I am a humanist or freethinker as were my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents and ancestors— and so not a Christian. By being a humanist, I am honoring my mother and father, which the Bible tells us is a good thing to do. But I say with all my American ancestors, 'If what Jesus said was good, and so much of it was beautiful, what does it matter if he was God or not? If Christ hadn't delivered the Sermon on the Mount, with its message of mercy and pity, I wouldn't want to be a human being. I would just as soon be a rattlesnake.'"

It didn't matter to Kurt whether Jesus "was God or not," and to him it was clear that Jesus was not divine, but "the most humane of human beings." It was because of Vonnegut's belief in the need for "extended families," rather than a belief in Christianity, that he wrote to a friend that "When I, an atheist hear from a man about to get out of prison who has no family waiting for him, who wants to know what to do with his freedom, I tell him 'Join a Church.'" Then he added, "The risk of that, of course, is that he might join the wrong one, and end up back in the cooler for blowing up an abortion clinic."

Kurt often wrote and spoke about the need for extended families, and in a letter to his friend Dr. Robert Maslansky, that was August of 2000, he cited this conclusion by the late Harvard theologian Harvey Cox, "What made Christianity comforting to so many was the congregation. Surprise, surprise, an extended family, as essential to human health as food." Vonnegut believed that providing people with extended families explained "the fantastic growth of Christianity in a Roman Empire which was so cruelly opposed to it. The state religion formed crowds of strangers to propitiate gods in enormous buildings or plazas. Christians prayed with cozy little bunches of friends who met regularly in cozy little places, which felt much better."

In a Playboy interview, Vonnegut said "I admire Christianity more than anything— Christianity as symbolized by gentle people sharing a common bowl." In Vonnegut's early novel *Cat's Cradle*, published in 1963, a visitor to an imaginary island assumes that Julian Castle, the character who is the "founder of the House of Hope and Mercy in the Jungle," is a "follower of Albert Schweitzer."

Castle says, "In case you run across Dr. Schweitzer in your travels you can tell him he isn't my hero but thanks to him, Jesus Christ is." The visitor says, "I think he'll be glad to hear it." Castle responds, "I don't give a damn if he is or not. This is something between Jesus and me."

There seems to be something between Jesus and Kurt Vonnegut— though it certainly is not a belief in Jesus' divinity and a frustration that "they had to make him a God", but an admiration, a fascination, and a kind of kinship with the man he called "my wild and loving brother" in what is surely one of the most surprising and seldom mentioned pieces of Vonnegut's work, his rewrite of the words to the Requiem Mass.

Vonnegut had attended the world premiere of Andrew Lloyd Weber's music composed for the Requiem Mass promulgated by Pope St. Pius V in 1570 by Decree of the Council of Trent performed at Saint Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan an outspokenly Anglican institution in 1985. As Kurt explained in his nonfiction book *Fates Worse than Death*, "Nobody seemed to know or care what the Latin words meant or where they came from. We were all there for the music. Or maybe because it was the chic place to be that night." But Vonnegut cared, when he read in the program the English translation of the Latin words to the mass. He found the words that sounded so lovely when sung in Latin were "terrible, promising a Paradise indistinguishable from the Spanish Inquisition, sadistic and masochistic." And he noted that "Lest somebody think I am mocking Holy Scripture, the mass was as frankly manmade and as nearly contemporary, taking the long view of history, as Hemingway's 'Green Hills of Africa.'"

When Kurt got home from hearing and reading the Requiem Mass, he "stayed up half the night" writing his own version, with a more merciful message, "I got rid of the judges and tortures and the lions' mouths, and having to sleep with the lights on." Kurt changed the opening and closing line, "let light perpetual shine upon them," to "let not light disturb their sleep." He explained that he didn't want his beloved sister Alice and his first wife Jane and all the other dead people to have to try to "get some sleep with the lights on."

In his translation, Vonnegut wrote of Jesus, "My wild and loving brother did try to redeem me by suffering death on the cross, let not such toil have been in vain." Making the Requiem Mass more merciful was so important to Vonnegut that he found a specialist in church Latin to translate his words into Latin. He found a

composer to set them to music. And after being turned down by several churches in New York City, his mass was given a premiere by "the best Unitarian Universalist choir in the country" in Buffalo, New York. That was quite a labor for a nonbelieving humanist.

Vonnegut was 63 when he translated the Requiem Mass, and five years later he wrote to his longtime friend Ben Hitz, who had been a friend at Shortridge High School, "I am now, because of my age and my steadfast lack of faith, at least a bishop in my own religion, German freethinking, and am, in fact, treated as a peer by the likes of Paul Moore, then Episcopal Bishop of New York, who has become one of my closest friends. I also get along fine with Jesuits. It wasn't until I was 64 that I came across a statement by Nietzsche that I could articulate why committed Christians and Jews sometimes find me respectable. Nietzsche said, 'Only a person of deep faith can afford the luxury of skepticism.'"

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim endures much of what Vonnegut endured as a prisoner of war, and toward the end of the book the narrator says "Billy cried very little, though he often saw things worth crying about, and in that respect, at least, he resembled the Christ of the carol, 'The cattle are lowing, / the Baby awakes, / But the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.'" Those words of the carol are the epigraph to the novel.

In the last few years of his life, Vonnegut turned more to drawing and artwork, feeling like Melville's whalers "who had said absolutely everything they could ever say." As well as his drawings that he collaborated with Joe Petro III to make silkscreens, Kurt made posters for friends expressing his views. The year before he died he sent me a drawing he had framed of a golden flower with words written in blue above it, "Blessed Are the Happy-Go-Lucky Girls and Boys." Printed by the date January 18th, 2006 was the inscription, "A New Beatitude for My Christian Friend Dan." I called to thank him and ask where he got the phrasing and what exactly it meant. He explained that he had never liked the Beatitude "Blessed are the meek," because he said "it reminded me of a hang-dog bunch of people, which I didn't much like. Then someone showed me a French Bible that instead of 'meek' said 'Blessed are the debonair.' I translated that as 'Happy-Go-Lucky Girls and Boys.'"

If I had to sum up Vonnegut's own theology, I would quote a passage from his novel *God Bless you Mr. Rosewater*, when the protagonist plans a baptismal speech he is asked to give for his neighbor's newborn twins, "Hello, Babies.

Welcome to Earth. It's hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It's round and wet and crowded. At the outside, babies, you've got about a hundred years here. There's only one rule that I know of, babies— Goddamn it, you've got to be kind." I would call that rule, like the words quoted of Eugene V. Debs, a "moving echo of the Sermon on the Mount."

I didn't know until I read and assembled his letters that Kurt had written a Christmas carol at the request of Lukas Foss, a well-known composer of classical music who had written an opera based on the Mark Twain short story *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*. Kurt sent a copy of the carol to Don Farber, his lawyer and friend, with a note that said, "Lukas Foss and I have talked for some years about doing some hymns and carols together. Here is my first serious try. Dear Lukas— I am not a Christian either, but you have to admit it's one hell of a story."

And this is Kurt's carol:

"Angels said come to this stable rude, Where deep in the hay, which is cattle's food, Lies a baby who sleeps full of milk so sweet, More precious than rubies from head to feet. Here is my guide, sang the Angels, to Paradise. Am I foolish to come here, or am I wise? This is the place, He is here, he is here. Those who would kill him Are near, are near. So keep him our secret, So dear, so dear And the mother's name is May-ree. Starlight did wake me from deathlike sleep So filled me with joy I did laugh and weep. I did follow the star to this rustic shed, That my starving soul might at last be fed. Here is my guide, said the starlight, to Paradise. Am I foolish to come here, or am I wise? This is the place, He is here, he is here. Those who would kill him Are near, are near. So keep him our secret, So dear, so dear. And the mother's name is May-ree. Season's Greetings, Kurt Vonnegut."

Susan Neville: That's so beautiful. Is it possible to hear that song?

Dan Wakefield: I don't think it's ever been done that I know of.

Susan Neville: It's never been done, that's interesting. But has it been set to music?

Dan Wakefield: I don't know that. I think I have a friend in Bloomington, Ian Woollen, who is a son of Evans Woollen the architect, and he's married to a woman named Sue [Inaudible] who teaches music at Indiana University. And three or four years

ago, she asked me if she could set to music Vonnegut's words to the Requiem mass. And I sent this request onto Mark Vonnegut who's the executor of Vonnegut's estate. And he said it was fine with him. And so, she has worked for the last two or three years to bring this up, and it's happening in Bloomington this weekend.

Susan Neville: Oh, that's great. I didn't know that.

Dan Wakefield: And she told me she would make a copy of it and send it to me which I would then send to Mark.

Susan Neville: Thank you, Dan, for reading that essay, which originally appeared in the quarterly Image Journal. And I think it's one of the best pieces about Vonnegut's kind of moral vision that I've ever read. And one of the things I wanted to ask you because you've mentioned that in the '60s you saw students walking around with his books and it really appealed to students at that time.

I teach a Vonnegut course to freshmen at Butler and I have to say that those books still do, they still have the same power. And in part, I think it's because of the freethinking. I mean, kids are born into religious traditions in the Midwest and they end up thinking they have to say a few words, "I believe." I believe this or. And it's something they clearly feel— many of them feel, particularly at 18, 19 hypocritical because they don't know what it means or what it is they're saying. And so, they suddenly read Vonnegut and it's like, yes, this is the reason, this is important it's because it's the antithesis of the code of Hammurabi, it's not an eye for an eye, a tooth for the tooth. The reason this is important is because the community is important. It has everything to do with seeing the thing that's important in the world is mercy and not justice.

Dan Wakefield: Yes.

Susan Neville: And I don't know, I just think it's really interesting that it's almost like his novels taken together become kind of canonical books of a new New Testament for kids.

Dan Wakefield I keep hearing new things in them. And last summer, Brian Fonseca at the Phoenix Theatre produced a musical based on *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. And hearing that musical, you know, sometimes you can read things and there are certain parts of it you don't remember and then you hear them in another

context. And what stuck out for me a lot in this musical because there from the novel was his talk about the Money River about what it meant to be born near the Money River or to be born far away from the Money River which is very obsessing concern right now in this country. And I think students are aware of that and are responding to that.

I have a good friend Shaun O'Connell who teaches at UMS Boston and he told me four or five years ago that he had trouble getting his students to read Updike and Roth but they all loved Vonnegut. And I think it's because when you think about it, I admire both of those authors, I've always had a special feeling for Updike because he wrote the first basketball novel that I've ever— *Rabbit Run*. And he was here as you know since you arranged that the first spirit in place was with me and Vonnegut and Updike. And I love Updike's work. But when I think about it, if I were a young person today, I would not be interested in reading about the suburbs in the 1950s, you know, those subjects seem so distant and so irrelevant as subjects, not as the way he wrote them but as subjects.

Whereas Vonnegut was always— whatever he wrote about, he was giving you new ways to look about— to think about them, to look at them. And I think that's one of the elements that makes him so exciting and relevant to students.

Susan Neville: Yeah, the money river. I think when we read *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* in my class, that's one of the things that my students responded to. And I think it's that vision of Eugene Debs that Vonnegut also took in, and I think from his Midwestern and German freethinking background, it's like, oh, yeah, I see, I understand when people are talking about privilege what that means. And I understand that the Money River is something that seems to just be available to some people and not to others. And they were really interested in thinking about Mr. Goldwater's vision should he give all his money away or not. That was the big question at the end. I mean, they had huge arguments over it/ But, you know, to even just think about those issues Vonnegut brings up, things that are really important.

Dan Wakefield: And the money river was important in Vonnegut's life in that it was a real struggle for him. And in 1957, his beloved older sister Alice died of cancer. In a weird, odd juxtaposition the very next day her husband died in a train crash going from New Jersey to New York City. Suddenly her children, her four sons were orphans. And on hearing this news, Vonnegut and his wife Jane, just

immediately without thinking— they were already having trouble supporting their own three children, but he got in the car and drove to New Jersey, picked up those boys and their two dogs and drove them back to Cape Cod and raised them as part of their family.

It's often said that they were adopted. Mark Vonnegut told me once, "Well, we never really legally adopted them because it would have cost a lot of money and we didn't have the money to do that." And they were known in the family as the orphans. And I met them at the memorial service for Kurt and in the program, they were billed as the orphans.

Susan Neville: Oh, my gosh. That's always been an amazing story to me. And again, it goes back to your essay because just without thinking, you know, the family that's a community, you do that, and that's the kind of person he was.

Dan Wakefield: And Mark Vonnegut who's become a good friend to me and who I met in the '70s. Mark and I were both living in Boston and he called me up and he said he was writing his first memoir called the *Eden Express*, which was about graduating from Swarthmore with other friends establishing a commune in British Columbia and taking some LSD and having a real, serious mental breakdown, he was in a mental hospital in British Columbia. And Kurt and Jane both went up to be with him during that time. And after that, he recovered from that, went back to Cambridge, Mass, and got in the Harvard Medical School and became a respected and beloved pediatrician in Boston.

And the way I got to know him when he was writing that first book, he asked Kurt for help and Kurt said, well, fathers should really never try to be their son's editors, it's too delicate. And so, he recommended that Mark see me. And so, I worked with Mark on that. I don't remember having that big a role but Mark had told people that I was helpful. And so, that sort of established our friendship and then Mark wrote a second memoir which I believe has never been given due, it's a really important and fabulous book, and the title is *Just Like Someone Without Mental Illness Only More So*.

And he talks about growing up with Kurt and he says— and he said to me in conversation that really bothers him when people come up to him and say what was it like being the son of a rich and famous author. And he said, "I don't know because I graduated from Swarthmore in '68 and that was a year before the money hit, and when *Slaughterhouse* was published." He said, "So, I always think of my

father as the man who was turned down for teaching an English course at Cape Cod Community College." And, of course, this was during the years when Vonnegut for a while was a Saab dealer, he had the Saab dealership for Cape Cod at the time when most Americans had never heard of Saab Automobiles. He did a variety of jobs and he invented a board game, he invented a particular kind of bowtie he hoped would become popular with students, which didn't work. Almost everything he tried didn't work.

Jane Vonnegut later wrote about that era saying, "What we were mainly living on was hope."

Susan Neville: I remember that.

Dan Wakefield: And I remember at one point that he borrowed \$100 from Mark's paper route money.

Susan Neville: Oh, my God. So many stories branch off of that. Can you tell the story about when Jane was getting together the clothing?

Dan Wakefield: Oh, yeah.

Well, Jane Vonnegut, who I really loved, she was one of the most generous just delightful warm, friendly people I've ever known. And she was a kind of I would say kind of mystic. I mean, she had foreknowledge of things. And it was in those days considered, you know, mental problem or something. But before the orphans came, before sister Alice died and they took in the boys, Jane started gathering clothes and blankets and furnishings and putting them in the barn at their house at Cape Cod.

And Kurt said, "What's this for? What are you doing?"

And she said, "Well, it's for the refugees who are coming."

And Kurt said, "Well, what refugees?"

Well, she knew the refugees were coming. So, Kurt thought, well, maybe she meant the Hungarian refugees at that time. And even had her see a therapist who basically said, well, as long as she is doing her work as a wife and mother, no use to go into this depth. But then, when the orphans came, there were clothes and blankets and sleeping gear for them already.

Susan Neville: That's amazing. That's just so amazing. One of the best stories. Also, I think you told me a story once about going with Kurt to either the commune that Mark was living in or to another commune in Canada.

Dan Wakefield: No, this was a commune in Massachusetts. It was right after *Going All the Way* came out. And I had known some sort of hippie guys in Boston. One of them was a remarkable young man at that time named Ray Mungo, he had been the editor of the Boston University newspaper and he started a commune. It was in Packers' corners, it was either Vermont or Massachusetts. But he and his friends wanted me to introduce them to Vonnegut. And I said, I really can't do it. This was after *Slaughterhouse-Five* and he was bombarded with requests and everything. And so, I later learned they just on their own turned up at his house in Cape Cod—

Susan Neville: Not to mention how many times that probably happened to him.

Dan Wakefield: And they knocked on the door and they later told me he just looked at them and said, "What can I do for you, people?" And they said, "Well, we just wanted to talk to you. We love your books." He said, "Well, let's go for a walk." And he took them for a walk around the Cape and they were happy and he was happy.

Anyway, later Sam Lawrence, the publisher published one of their books. Steve Diamond had written a book about the commune called *What the Trees Said*. And Ray Mungo wrote a wonderful book about that commune called *Total Loss Farm*. But they were having a celebration, it must have been like their second or third anniversary as a commune and they invited me and Kurt and Sam Lawrence to come as honorary uncles of the commune. And that was a really nice thing. We did not eat the brownies that we were offered but it was a great occasion. And we were glad to be a part of that. But Kurt, as I said, was definitely not a counterculture person. He said he had once had one inhalation of a marijuana cigarette with Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead and it didn't do much for him and so that was that.

Susan Neville: Kurt was a pretty good drinker though, right?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, and one of his habits which he wrote about was to stay up late and call old girlfriends or other friends and said he would drink bourbon and his breath was like a combination of roses and mustard gas. But one of my favorite stories he had a bad experience when he was a senior at Shortridge, there was a

tradition, which luckily was no longer a tradition when I was a senior, but on graduation, some of the teachers gave joke presents to the student and the football coach of the time gave Vonnegut a subscription to the Charles Atlas Bodybuilding course which he felt very bad about, he felt humiliated. He said he was a tall, gangly uncoordinated kind of kid.

Susan Neville: Presents never work. They never work.

Dan Wakefield: And so, after Slaughterhouse was published and suddenly Vonnegut was sort of really overnight rich and famous. And so, one night when he was making his late-night phone calls, he called Indianapolis information and he got the number of the coach, called him up and said, "This is Kurt Vonnegut. You may not remember me, I just wanted to tell you my body turned out just fine." And I said to Kurt, that's probably what every student wanted to tell some teacher or other but never had the guts.

But he loved these phone things. I remember once in New York after lunch, it had come up at lunch that I knew a man called John Morrow who I had known in New York in the '50s, he was a well-known anthropology teacher at Vassar, a great guy. And Morrow had been in the Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War.

And Kurt said, "Oh, my God. John Morrow, he was my classmate in Chicago when we were studying anthropology." He said, "Let's call him up."

I said, "Well, I don't know how to get a hold of him."

And he said, "Well, we'll figure it out. Where did you last hear from him?"

I said, "Well, the last I heard he was at Cornell."

And he says, "Well, we'll call up Ithaca information."

And so, we did and we got John Morrow on the phone. And Kurt talked to him about Chicago and then I got on and I said, "Well, John, when you come to New York next, let me know, I'd love to get together with you."

And John said, "Dan, I'm in a wheelchair". You know, I forgot he was like 20 years older than me. But anyway, it was— Kurt just loved making that connection.

Susan Neville: I've got a phone call from him once and I didn't realize that he was a phone caller and it terrified me that Kurt Vonnegut was on the phone. And I just remember him saying, "Susan, Susan, what are the words to- on the banks of the Wabash: Was it Numen Hey or I don't know." You know, he was confused between the words. And I thought I don't know. And it was before the internet so obviously he couldn't look it up, I couldn't look it up. But I said, "I'll call you back." And I went looking around the house for a book called the Indiana Experience that had the words in there.

Dan Wakefield: By the way, I loved, you know, WFYI, the PBS station in Indianapolis did a wonderful documentary of Vonnegut. And at the very end, they quote him as he says that if he could be remembered in any way it would be as the gentleman from Indiana. I think that's the way— who was—

Susan Neville: The gentleman from Indiana, Tarkington?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, Booth Tarkington was known as the gentleman from Indiana.

Susan Neville: Right. I mean, it is really amazing when you look through his books and you see how many little winks toward Indiana there are, they're in *Timequake*, I think there's a groundskeeper at Butler University, where we are right now named something Hartke after the senator from Indiana. And Debs comes up and, you know, friends of his from childhood and the editor of the Wall Street Journal who was named Barney Kilgore, right, and that shows up.

Dan Wakefield: And he wrote once that— he said, "Whenever my writing is the best is when I'm writing as a person from Indianapolis which is who I am." And he also was very aware of the social stratification and all its meanings in Indianapolis. And he once said, he gave even a talk to the Indiana Civil War Union, and he said, "I attended a wholly white High School in Indianapolis and I come from a city that was just as segregated as Biloxi, Mississippi, except for the drinking fountains and the buses." So, he was aware as I think no other Indiana dignitaries of the era were or certainly never mentioned these things.

Susan Neville: Right. The books that he wrote, the only one I can think of, well, maybe *Deadeye Dick* is set in Indianapolis but *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* is set in someplace that's probably kind of near New Harmony, Indiana.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, he was wiser than I in—

Susan Neville: In setting his books other places?

Dan Wakefield: But, by the way, when I edited the book of Vonnegut's letters which is called Kurt Vonnegut Letters what struck me was how loyal he was throughout his life to friends from high school, to friends from the army, friends he worked with at General Electric, friends from Iowa where he taught students who he had taught, all of these people, and friends from Cornell. One friend named Miller Harris who had started out wanted to be a writer, had some things published in Harper's. And his father was on the Arrow Shirt Company and he realized this was a more secure route and he decided to take that. But he always sent Vonnegut the latest Arrow shirts and things. And I loved the correspondence between them. And I was thrilled when I was doing the letters book, I wonder if he was alive and if I can still get hold of him. And lo and behold, I found him on the internet and he was great. And he said he was just on his way to a clothing convention in Colorado or something. And he spoke about Kurt with great affection.

And also, Kurt had one person I really want to mention who is not mentioned enough, is his very good Shortridge friend Majie Failey who wrote a very nice book about his childhood and their friendship called *We Never Danced Cheek to Cheek*. That was because Majie was very short. But he used to stay with her and her husband when he came to town. She was a very close friend. And I had the good fortune of meeting one of his friends who was in the Owls Club with him in Shortridge—

Susan Neville: What is the Owls Club?

Dan Wakefield: The Shortridge Clubs that had nothing to do with the school administration, social clubs were very, very important. I was in Spats Club. Vonnegut and his friends had created something the Owls Club. And one of them was Ben Hitz who was the best man at his wedding and who he corresponded with was in it. And also, a man named Victor Josie. And I was able to speak to him. And Victor published a paper, I think a weekly paper in a small town, somewhere around Indiana, and Vonnegut had written a lovely introduction to a book of his collection of the papers and so on. So, he was always very thoughtful to anybody he had any connection with like that. And Victor confirmed to me, I had always wondered if this was true that Vonnegut has a story about a soldier coming home when he's in the army, he hasn't yet been sent overseas and he

comes to visit his old high school sweetheart who sounds like Jane and was called *A Long Walk to Forever*. And at the time she was engaged to somebody else. And they had been sweethearts before that in high school and he convinced her to marry him. And that was a very good move because as Mark Vonnegut said, "She more than anyone confirmed his writing, believed in him, believed more than he did that he would be great." I can see that.

And it was funny he later spoke ill of that story in one of the story collections I found, in an introduction that he said, thinking of those stories, he said he was embarrassed that he had written a lady's magazine romance story. And he was putting down that story. But I think it's one of his best stories. It is very spare and lovely and just gets everything in some exact way.

Susan Neville: That's great. Maybe you don't want to answer this or maybe you want to cut it, but, can you talk a little bit about what you think led to the breakup of his marriage with Jane because it seems like they were in many ways really good for one another.

Dan Wakefield: Yes, for many years. And Mark writes wonderfully about that in his memoir *Just Like Someone Without Mental Illness Only More So*.

Susan Neville: Which is a great book.

Dan Wakefield: And I really don't know but I always had a theory that, you know, if you were going to write a novel about a breakup of a marriage, you could not have a more classic thing than a man who has lived all his life up until his mid-40s struggling to make a living, he's lived with a particular kind of person and he suddenly, after becoming really overnight rich and famous, he changes his entire life, he leaves a bucolic existence on Cape Cod for the very middle of Manhattan, marries a woman who is physically and in many other ways the exact opposite of his first wife, it was just like turning his life over. It was like something like he'd write in a novel.

Susan Neville: That's what it's always seemed like to me. But then, you know, when you've entered act II of the novel and suddenly you get everything you thought you wanted then it's like what do you do next?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah.

Susan Neville: I wondered if it had something to do with sudden fame and sudden not knowing, you know, what do you do with that?

Dan Wakefield: And also, that first part of life was so intense, that holding it all together to making and raising these kids in a way that they've all turned out wonderfully and talented, and it's just an amazing feat. And maybe he just had to say that was so exhausting. I'm just going to do the opposite.

Susan Neville: Start over again.

Dan Wakefield: I mean, I don't think he consciously thought that but that's what seemed to have happened.

Susan Neville: Yeah, when I met him, he was in his 60s and he seemed actually lonely, like, you know, the third act of being rich and famous what he said is it's like I can't go in a grocery store, you know, I'm recognizable. He was very recognizable, you could draw a caricature of his face and couldn't go anyplace without someone recognizing him. I'm sure that he had somebody show up at his door and says, you know, hi, you changed my life. I need to talk to you. You have to read my work. I think for someone for whom community and family or the community that a family makes was so obviously important to him on so many different levels. Suddenly being cut off from that because of his fame had to have been hard.

Dan Wakefield: Seymore Lawrence who at age 28 was the director of the Atlantic Monthly Press which was a big deal. And in fact, he gained fame in publishing with Kathrine Anne Porter. Everybody had given up, she was a famous short story writer, everybody loved her stories, everybody was waiting for her big novel. And at least three publishers had signed her up for the novel over the years. She'd never come through with it. Everybody had given up. So, Sam went to her and said, "I want you to write that novel." And he didn't just give her a contract, he took her to New England Inns where he would put her up and he would talk to the Inn keeper and say, "Look, I want her to mainly drink milk. I want her— " And he would go up on weekends and check-in and read what's she done and encourage her, make sure that she's okay, she's not struggling. And my God, it led to *Ship of Fools*.

Susan Neville: That's such a great story.

Dan Wakefield: And so, Atlantic Publish in conjunction with the Little Brown became a huge best-seller and movie and everything. And he asked for part of the profit. And they, of course, just totally rejected him even of such possibility. So, he quit. And after he quit, he took a job with Alfred Kanob but he didn't want to live in New York, he liked living in Boston. And he took a job with Kanob but he was very unhappy. There used to be a shuttle to Boston and New York, he commuted and his main work for Kanob was clerical. I mean, just signing contracts and all that. And he wanted to work with writers. So, he quit that. And he didn't quite know what to do and he published when he was at Atlantic Little Brown, he published J. P. Donleavy who wrote *The Ginger Man*. And Sam published Donleavy's next book and they became friends. And Sam at loose ends went to Ireland to stay with Donleavy and he just said, "What am I going to do? I have to figure this out."

And Donleavy, he said, "You're only going to be happy if you have your own publishing company."

And Sam said, "I don't have money to that." He said, "My wife has some stock worth about 50,000 but, you know, that wouldn't—"

And Donleavy said, "Yeah, that's enough." He says, "Look, to be a publisher, all you need is a room, a telephone, and a writer. And I'll be the writer so you can start with me."

Susan Neville: Oh, that's so great.

Dan Wakefield: And Sam did it, exactly that. He got a room at 90 Beacon Street, he had one elderly Vassar graduate named Mrs. Henley and she used to come in and type. She always wore a hat in the office. And he didn't even ever give her a chair that was appropriate. She had to put telephone books on a chair to sit on. And anyway, so that was his office. And he made an arrangement, and this was one of the first of its kind to have his "imprint" with the publishers. So, he made arrangements with Delacorte, they were famous for paperbacks and they needed a prestigious hardcover fiction line. So, he said, I can bring you those authors. And so, the deal was the books that he brought, he would select the writers and the books, they would do the publishing, promotion, and etc. And it would say Delacorte Press a Seymour Lawrence Book. So, that's what he did. And the amazing thing is he published *Slaughterhouse-Five*, three publishers had turned it down.

Susan Neville: Well I can see it, it was so different. I mean, if you're looking for a World War II novel, you are looking for— [Inaudible]

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. So, Sam was a perfect guy because that's what he was looking for was something he said was different but of great quality, something in the next wave. And so, Sam had written Kurt a fan letter for a review Kurt had done of a Random House Dictionary in the New York Times Book Review. And it was very funny and clever. And Sam wrote to him and said, "If you can make a dictionary sound funny in a review," he said, "you've got to be good." He said, "If you ever need a publisher, come and knock on my door. I'm at 90 Beacon Street in Boston."

So, one day Kurt on vacation from Iowa having had Slaughterhouse turned down by the other three publishers who had published his hardcover books went in to see Sam. He just knocked on the door, he hadn't called, and he said, "You told me to knock on your door." He said, "Here is the book. And I don't know if you want to read it." Then he told him the other publishers turned it down.

Sam said, "Yeah, I very much want to read it." So, about three days later, Kurt got a call and Sam said, "I really like your book, I want to publish it, I want to make you an offer. Can you come into the office?"

So, Kurt comes up from the Cape, Sam said, "I want to give you a contract for this and your next two books. So, be it a three-book contract for hardcover and publishing."

And he was one of the first who could offer both hardcover and— because that's what Delacorte did. So, he offered him 35,000 a book. And Kurt had never been offered more than 5000 for a book and never even made that on a book.

And so, Kurt said, "You shouldn't pay me that much money."

And Sam said, "Well, why not?"

Kurt said, "My books don't make money."

And Sam said— when he got excited, Sam said, "Well, you write the books, I'll worry about the money." And that was it. And Sam went about buying up rights

to all his other books and putting them all in the uniformed edition. And as Kurt said, "Saving me from smithereens."

Susan Neville: So, how did he get the job teaching at Iowa because that was before *Slaughterhouse-Five* came out? And the books hadn't really, you know—

Dan Wakefield: Robert Lowell was supposed to teach there and he for some reason couldn't do it. And I don't know who was who knew of Kurt— you know, he began to be known. There was a critic who taught at Iowa, a great guy named Robert Scholes and he thought it would be good to have Kurt, you know, a young, innovative guy, etc. And that really saved Kurt. I mean, it was the first time he knew other writers. I mean, he was lonely on the Cape Cod, I think that's another reason he wanted to go to the middle of Manhattan. And so, suddenly he was at Iowa, there's Nelson Algren famous at the time, Frans Bojailey, and they had a rotating group of authors who would come in and teach and Kurt loved it. And then while there, Scholes interviewed him, got to know him, and he included Kurt in a critical book. It was the first time somebody had written seriously of Kurt as a serious fiction writer but it was about five different writers and one of them was Lawrence Durrell, the others were all very well-known. So, to include Kurt in this was a big deal. And I think it was called *The Fabricators*, I mean, I'm not sure.

Susan Neville: Oh, I think you're right. *The Fabulators*?

Dan Wakefield: *The Fabulators*, yeah. And then Scholes was the one who was asked to write the New York Times book review of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and it was a frontpage review.

Susan Neville: And there it took off.

Dan Wakefield: It happened. And I got to know Scholes. His daughter became a very good friend of mine and died young of a brain tumor which Scholes' first wife had died of too. It was a tragic story But I got to know him a little bit better.

Susan Neville: So, then he hired you to teach at Iowa when you've been out there?

Dan Wakefield: No, Jack Leggett was then the director and I had known him from New York. And also, I guess it would be of interest that, you know, the guy who really discovered Kurt for magazines was Knox Burge. And what happened, Kurt

was sending all these stories— and Knox Burger was a fiction editor of Collier's. And he had gone to Cornell. And so, with one of the stories he wrote, sort of scribbled a note and said, "Are you the Kurt Vonnegut who works on the Cornell Daily Sun? And I think I knew you then." And he scrolled his name and Kurt at first couldn't read it. And he couldn't figure out who this was and then he finally kept looking at, oh, it's Knox Burger. So, he wrote back and then they became friends who'd work together. And that first story Kurt wrote over and over until it was finally published. And then Knox got him an agent. And sort of looked over, and so he was the guru. And so, after Slaughterhouse, Kurt wrote to Knox. He said, "Listen, you've always told me what to do, you should be my agent." And so, Knox who had ended up in publishing company and he left his job, he made up stationary with his literary thing, you know, and his first act was to write Kurt a long letter telling him all kind of things he thought he should do with his work in the future and this and that. And Kurt didn't like it. And Kurt wrote back and said, "I really didn't want an uncle. And so, I don't want you to be my agent." And it was crushing to Knox.

Susan Neville: Sure. So, did Knox go on and did he become an agent to others?

Dan Wakefield: To me.

Susan Neville: To you?

Dan Wakefield: In fact, Kurt recommended me to Knox.

Susan Neville: Oh, so, he made up for.

Dan Wakefield: He was trying. I mean, you know, nothing could ever make up for Kurt. Sam was sort of pressing me to leave my longtime agent who was a great guy and I always felt bad about it, James Oliver Brown. But in some things, Sam got me all worked up. And I fired Jim and then Kurt said, "Well, you should get this guy Knox Burger. He's really good." But Knox really, you know, Knox— I've read pages and pages of letters he wrote, single-spaced how to make his story better and how to, you know, do that. He was just amazing. And Knox was a great guy. And he could be kind of quirky and, you know, he became a good agent for a lot of people. But I must say it was Sam Lawrence, his main thing he loved was to find writers who had once done something that you'd never heard from again like Katherine Anne. So, for instance, he looked up Frank Conroy who had great success with his book *Stop-Time*, it was one of the first

sort of memoirs of that kind. And looks up Conroy and Conroy had published maybe three or four stories, he hadn't done anything, he lost confidence. And Sam said, okay, I want to bring you back. I want to— and he published a slim volume because that was all there was, you know, and brought Conroy back. And then Conroy wrote— what I think is a great novel that never got its due called *Body and Soul*. But then Sam did that with Jim Harrison with Barry Hannah, he would go— and Jayne Anne Phillips. And in those days, 40% of booksellers were independent. And Sam, before his first job— he knew he wanted to be a publisher— before his first job, he spent a year as a book salesman, he traveled all over the country. He got to know personally all of these guys who owned the independent stores. So, he could almost make you a best-seller by these contacts that he had.

Susan Neville: Plus, it sounds like he had an incredible literary taste too.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, they came to trust him. Yeah, oh, everybody he published, Gish Jen, Susan Minot.

Susan Neville: Yeah, he had a great taste.

Dan Wakefield: And he would send you on book tours. He'd give you these personal things. Oh, you've got to see this guy in Denver and then this guy in Jackson, Mississippi, and just did it.

Susan Neville: You know, what's interesting to me, it sounds like he was discovering writers and at the same time that Gordon Lish was, is that were they— ?

Dan Wakefield: No, I never heard Sam mention Gordon Lish.

Susan Neville: Interesting. Because I think that Susan Minot's books and Jane and Phillip's books coming out around the same time as Amy Hempel and Mark Richard.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, I was not a Gordon Lish fan. But anyway—

Susan Neville: But they sound like polar opposites in terms of how they worked with their writers.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, because Sam would totally build you up. Gordon tore you down.

Susan Neville: Exactly. And if you could live through that, then, you know, you may have ended up with a book. Look at Ray Carver, I mean, he kind of takes credit for Ray Carver's work, which it sounds like Sam Lawrence never would have done.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, and he called himself Captain Fiction. Sam was much more— Sam would never do something like that. I mean, he was more formal in a sense but yet very informal in his relationship. He got to know his authors. One of the first things we did after he signed me up, I remember that late that winter he said, "Do you want to go to the islands?" I didn't even know what Island was, you know. So, he planned the trip to St. Thomas and we went there and he found the house where he could rent a thing and set up deep-sea fishing and all that. I mean, he loved to have a good time. And his whole thing was built on these writers may not make money right now but they will always make you money. And when Delacorte at a certain point when it was bought by Bertlesmann and Bantam and all-new accountants came in and they cut Sam off. They fired him. And because that year, his profits didn't come up to what was spent and he tried to explain, yeah, but these people who were not making— they are going to make money. And they always did. But that wasn't what was being done. It had to be the bottom line, it had to be right now, blah, blah, blah. And then Sam kind of cast around, he was briefly with somebody. But then he kind of settled in again with Houghton Mifflin and it was Sam who was responsible for my book *New York in the Fifties*. And what happened, I had published a piece on Baldwin, a profile in GQ. And Sam read it and he called me up, and he said, "This is one of the best things you've done, this should be part of a book on New York in the '50s." I had never thought of such a book, you know. I mean, just so he did that kind of thing. And, you know, yeah. It was great.

Susan Neville: I'd love to talk about New York in the Fifties maybe on the next podcast too, that would be great. Thank you, we'll talk again soon.

[Music]

Susan Neville: Thanks again to Mr. Wakefield and thank you to our listeners for listening. Naptown is taped at Butler University's Irwin Library with the help of Megan Rutledge-Grady. Funding for Naptown was provided by the Aris Fund, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Indiana Humanities. This is a

Dominique Walden, Maury Dashner production. Again, this is your host,
Susan Neville. See you next time in Naptown.

[Closing Music]