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VONNEGUT AND ME: Conversations and Close Encounters

GREG MITCHELL

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Kurt Vonnegut, six years after his passing, remains one of the most popular and influential novelists of the past half-century. Now Greg Mitchell, award-winning author and magazine writer--and a Vonnegut fan going back to "Cat's Cradle"--recounts for the first time his "conversations and close encounters of the weird kind" with the novelist starting in 1970, just after Vonnegut first reached a mass audience with his classic "Slaughterhouse-Five," and continuing for years after.

It's an insightful, unique and often very funny profile of the artist as he confronted unexpected fans, fame and fortune for the rest of his life. Vonnegut hailed one of Mitchell's pieces about him as "daring and imaginative...I admire you terrifically as a writer."

Mitchell quotes extensively from his interviews with Vonnegut, and from letters the novelist sent him. It's all vintage Vonnegut: on war and pacifism, drugs and booze, writing and performing, his many young fans--and growing old himself. Hard truths and "benign lies." Nixon and Bush. With plenty of dark humor along the way.

Included in its entirety is one of the most acclaimed profiles of Vonnegut ever: Mitchell's 1974 cover story for the legendary Crawdaddy magazine. Mitchell, the first to write under the byline of Vonnegut's most famous creation, Kilgore Trout, combined quotes from his actual interview with Vonnegut with a wild fictional reunion of the novelist's other recurring characters one day in New York--a tribute to his greatest work (and cleverest lines). Vonnegut's response: "Against all odds, hey presto, you made the chips all fit together in the same machine. Nice, nice, very nice."

Early on, Vonnegut wrote to Mitchell: "I have decided that I have been stupid about life, have been unnecessarily unhappy for too long, and it is too early to give any reports on my belated to pursuit of happiness." This cogent and witty book, "Vonnegut and Me," shows and tells part of what happened in that pursuit, from 1970 to the novelist's death in 2007.

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Greg Mitchell has written more than a dozen books, including "The Campaign of the Century: Upton Sinclair's Race for Governor of California" (winner of the Goldsmith Book Prize), "Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady" (a New York Times Notable Book) and with Robert Jay Lifton, "Hiroshima in America." He writes daily for the The Nation and he is the former editor of Editor & Publisher. His most recent books include "Atomic Cover-up," "Hollywood Bomb" and a pair of books related to WikiLeaks and Bradley Manning.

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