

IN TRASH WE TRUST



# TRASH UNIVERSITY



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TRANSCRIPTION  
OF A LECTURE BY  
PROFESSOR ULIBARRI,  
TRASH UNIVERSITY

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**I**t is a great honor for me to be allowed to address you on the occasion of David Sedaris' induction into the Trash Collector's Hall of Fame. He is one of the great masters of our profession, admired by trash collectors all over the world.

Incidentally, I just heard that as a sideline he also writes books. Oh well, everybody needs a hobby.

The fact of his being a writer in the few free hours the serious business of trash collecting leaves him, probably was the reason for the misprint in today's invitation. Funnily it says "Literaturhaus" where of course it should say "Litter house".

As to myself: I am a professor at Trash University. For those who don't know the institution: It is something like Trump university, only even trashier.

Among our former students are such estimable personalities as Britain's Prince Harry, of whom, I am proud to say, the Queen has been overheard boasting that he's always bringing home trash.

Picking up litter, I am sorry to say, will not make you famous. It will not make you rich. There's nothing you can get from picking up other people's trash except tetanus. But at least with this award David Sedaris gets our gratitude and becomes a part of the art's rich tradition, which I would briefly like to share with you today.

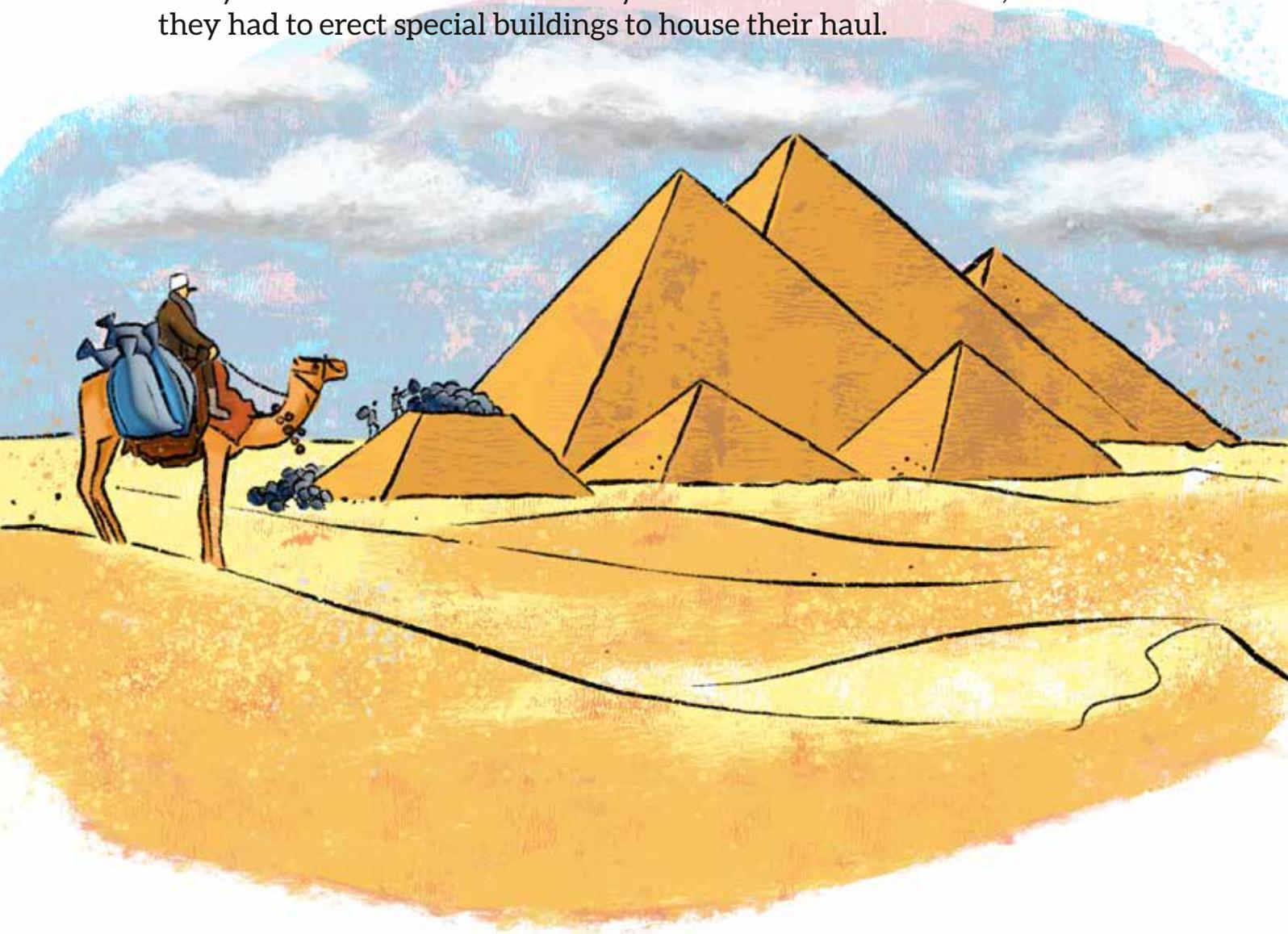
The history of the art of trash collecting is as old as the history of humankind itself. It begins in the Stone Age, when Starbucks and McDonalds did not yet exist, and so there was not enough litter to drop carelessly all over the place. The only trash you could throw away were stones, which were gathered in great piles that can still be admired today. Just think of the great stone ring at Trashhenge.



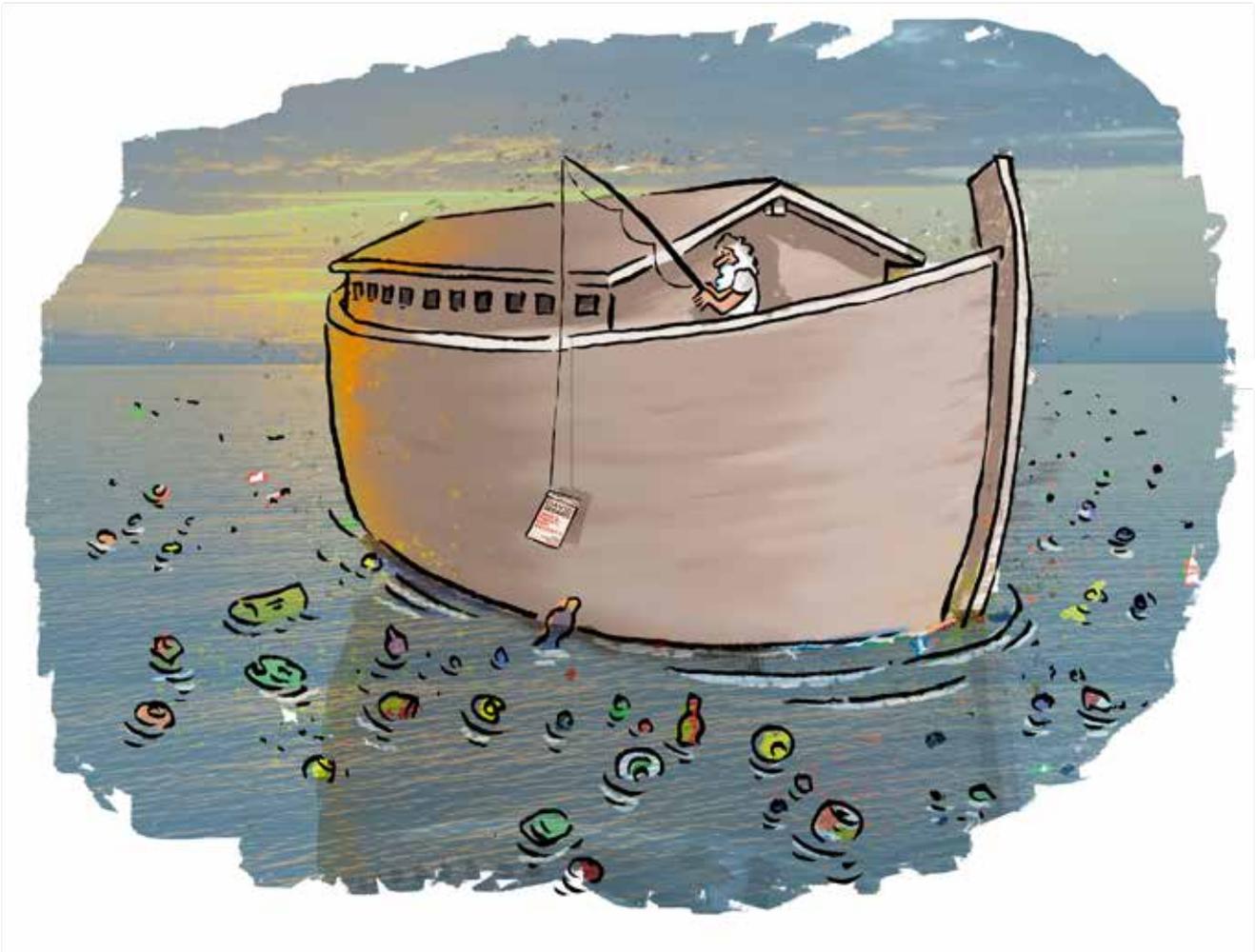
The question of what to do with all the accumulated trash arose very early in human history. In the classic tales of Greek mythology we hear about the canny way the ancient Greeks tried to drop their accumulated trash on their neighbor's lawn: By packing it up in a container shaped like a horse.



The priests of Ancient Egypt used litter thrown on the banks of the Nile to read the will of the gods. Too much trash meant rivers of blood or plagues of frogs or lice or locusts. Today it usually means: too many tourists. There were so many trash collectors at the time, that they had to erect special buildings to house their haul.



An early inventor tried to solve the problem of too much trash not by collecting it, as today's honoree does, but by sweeping it away with jets of water for forty days and forty nights. The effects of the ill-advised experiments of this man were catastrophic. The trash was not cleared away, but only distributed differently by all the water.



The Dark Ages got their name from the fact, that the art of collecting trash seemed to have been forgotten with the rest of traditional culture. This tragically happened just when Germanic tribes were sweeping through Europe with their soccer scarves and Pilsner. In those days you couldn't walk through a field without tripping on a beer bottle. Or a Bayern München fan.





In the Renaissance things started to pick up again. In Italy Leonardo da Vinci painted *The Last Supper*, showing how Jesus' disciples reacted when he said he saw one of them dump out their car ashtray in the restaurant parking lot.



By the late seventeenth-hundreds the art of trash collecting was in full bloom, made even more fashionable when Napoleon Bonaparte sent his Grand Armée to clean up Europe armed with bayonets for stabbing trash and bicorne hats that could be unrolled into heavy duty 35-gallon trash bags. Napoleon himself was an avid trash collector. As his wife Joséphine considered this an unseemly hobby for an emperor, he used to hide his collected trash under his coat before throwing it away.



The reign of Queen Victoria in England, who recycled trash to make broaches, pendants and the crown jewels, ushered in a new scientific era of trash collecting. Charles Darwin labeled and analyzed litter, publishing his findings in *On the Origins of Debris*. And Friedrich Nietzsche at the same time developed his concept of the Eternal Return: the philosophical theory that no matter how much trash you clean away today, there'll be more trash to clean away tomorrow. The 11th Dalai Lama said something very similar, namely that each piece of litter was a disturbed soul with bad karma and could not re-enter the cycle of reincarnation until brought to rest in garbage can.



Trash collecting has also figured prominently in folklore and literature. Just think of the story of Hansel and Gretel, where two children find their way to the cake shop by following a trail of discarded bottles, hamburger wrappers and broken vials of witches' poison.



And lastly let me give you only one example of trash collecting in literature: Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky's great novel *Crime and Punishment*, telling the story of how a dedicated trash collector single-handedly rids his city of litterers.



**A**nd of course there are the books by today's honoree David Sedaris. I have not read any of them, but I am convinced that they are full of trash. Congratulations, Mr. Sedaris, on your induction into the Hall of Fame!



(Even this book will be trash someday...)

