


Text Type: Interview  
Suggested finishing time: 25 mins



Listen!

# A Life Unlived is Still a Life

Let's Think! 

1. What do you think of former offenders?
2. Do you think former offenders should be given a second chance?

T : Theo

K : Kurt

- T I know you've been interviewed several times, and I'd like to begin by asking a related question: aren't you afraid of journalists' supposed tendency to make former offenders sound worse than what some may have assumed them to be?
- K My own experience is that they make things seem better than they are. Some of you have turned my story into a spiritual adventure, or a tragic story with a perfect ending. Reading your words, I felt like an ugly duckling that's been transformed into a swan. This miraculous power has made my life much easier. Before that, you couldn't imagine how great the difference is, I mean, the difference between how people say they would treat people like me and what they have actually done. With your peers' help, people now see me differently. 5 10
- T Well, if that's so, why don't we begin to talk about your story?
- K Am glad to. It's rather short and tedious. Forty-one years ago, I was a twenty-year-old young man, without money but at the same time being the breadwinner of a poor family. Not exactly a family, in fact—only my mum and I, the only child. My father died young and left behind him a huge debt. 'You pay your father's debts', as the Chinese proverb goes. 15 And so I was forced to try my hands on everything that would yield me money.
- T And what did you do exactly?
- K A friend of mine offered \$10,000 in return for my smuggling a little bag of cocaine into another country for a friend of his. I said yes almost immediately, though I still don't know why I made that rash decision. Money couldn't have been the entire story: I could've easily made as much or even more, in another less dangerous way. I might've stopped functioning as a rational animal. I was that lost. 20
- T Needless to say, you got caught. 25
- K Needless indeed. The funny thing is, I was the first person singled out from that plane to be checked by local customs. The goddess of luck wasn't on my side. What followed was largely unworthy of a mention. Just the same old things: conviction, jail, endless boredom and meaningless toil. For 30 years! Yet, I have almost no memory of them now. Pain stiffens the mind and the heart alike. 30
- T Did you have any idea of what was happening out in the world? 35

## More to Take Away

The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP) is a non-governmental, non-profit charitable organisation aiming to provide ex-offenders and discharged prisoners with the social and mental support they need to re-enter society as welcomed members.

## Moral

'It is impossible to live without failing at something unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all—in which case, you fail by default.'

J.K. Rowling, British author

- K** A few things. My mum died. My girlfriend married someone else. As for my friends, I had not heard anything from any of them since I was jailed. I remembered wondering if they had all been tricked into jail by that so-called friend. In this way I passed more than half of my life, surrounded by people who neither loved nor were loved by me.
- T** Did you do anything to make yourself feel better, like learning a trade for your future livelihood? 40
- K** I had tried a few things, but failed to put my heart and soul into any of them. I thought I was going to die in jail, so it was pointless to.
- T** It sounds like you were in a desperate state of mind. What happened next?
- K** When I had finally been released, nobody was there to give me a hug or a ride back home. I tried to recover some lost friendships, but no one showed any interest. I applied for jobs. No replies. Never had I felt so hopeless. 45
- T** How did you get out of this situation?
- K** The social worker that I was assigned to introduced me to the owner of a Chinese restaurant. He was interested in helping people like me, often by hiring them. I'm one of those lucky folks. But he clearly thought of me as more than a problem to be fixed and then shoved aside. This is clear in the way he entrusted me with important tasks, almost from the beginning, and left the business to my management after his retirement. He made no secret about how much he trusted me and appreciated my passion for providing customers with quality food. Both by what he did for me and how he thought about me, he saved my life. He's been gone for two years now. I miss him dearly. 50
- T** What do you want to say to other former offenders?
- K** You're an ex-offender. That means, you were but no longer are. So don't be ashamed of yourself or be too sorry about what you did. You've been punished. What was punishment good for if the guilt stays with you even after it? Take no heed of past sorrows, and stay away from self-pity. Face the fact that those wasted years, along with the happiness they might've brought, are gone forever. Is this a defeat? Maybe, but the greater defeat is to want them back like a slave. 55

~800 words



### Looking into Grammar

Inversion can be used to emphasise important ideas or to present things in a more formal or dramatic way.

✓ **Never have I heard** (✗ Never I have heard) a sweeter voice.

? Underline a sentence in which inversion is used in the interview.

## Part A Multiple Choice Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the interview. Choose the best answer by blackening the appropriate circle.

1. In lines 1-3, Theo thought that \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Kurt dislikes journalists
  - B. Kurt is tired of being interviewed
  - C. Kurt is likely to think of journalists as bad truth-tellers
  - D. Kurt is a worse person than he seems
2. In lines 4-10, Kurt gave journalists credit for their writing and then proceeded to \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. conclude...people thought badly of him
  - B. deduce...journalists' portrayals are crucial
  - C. imply...the public is biased
  - D. indicate...he was treated differently than how people said they would
3. Which of the following may NOT be a factor in Kurt's need to make money as a young adult?
- A. his father's death
  - B. his gambling habits
  - C. his father's financial burdens
  - D. his disadvantaged background
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is what prompted Kurt to take risks, but he made the mistake out of \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Poverty...thoughtlessness
  - B. Greed...confusion
  - C. Poverty...boldness
  - D. Immaturity...recklessness
5. Kurt \_\_\_\_\_ to recall how his years in jail were as the experience \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. failed...was too distressing to him
  - B. managed...spanned decades
  - C. dared...sickened him
  - D. ached...reminded him of his misfortunes
6. Which of the following did his jail sentence NOT take away from him?
- A. time to spend with his mother
  - B. friendships
  - C. his love life
  - D. the ability to love and feel loved
- 6 What might have happened if Kurt hadn't been jailed?
7. Which of the following helped change Kurt's life?
- I. his social worker's assistance
  - II. his employer's trust
  - III. his role in the Chinese restaurant
  - IV. the things he learnt in jail
- A. I and III
  - B. I and IV
  - C. I, II and III
  - D. I, III and IV
- 7 Identify whether the information in each option is relevant.
8. In lines 59-66, Kurt advised other former offenders \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. to make full use of their time
  - B. to have a positive outlook
  - C. to learn from the punishment
  - D. to never dwell on the past



**Self-evaluation Checklist**

Please scan the QR code on P.6 to access the checklist for evaluating your own reading progress.

## Part B Pre-HKDSE Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the interview. For questions 2 and 5, answer in complete sentences.



1. In line 31, the word 'Yet' can best be replaced by '\_\_\_\_\_'.  
\_\_\_\_\_

- A. Nonetheless       B. Since       C. Likewise       D. Alternatively

2. In line 38, Kurt described that friend with the adjective 'so-called'. What did it imply? Explain your answer.

2 What did that person do?

---

---

3. Look for words in the interview to match the definitions below.

- |                           |                                     |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (i) _____ (lines 11-24)   | (v.) to produce something positive  |
| (ii) _____ (lines 25-43)  | (n.) a job that needs special skill |
| (iii) _____ (lines 44-66) | (n.) attention                      |

4. Arrange the following events in the order in which they happened by writing the numbers (1-8) in the boxes. The first one has been done for you.

- |                                  |                                |                                    |                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| (i) Failure to renew friendships | <input type="text" value="5"/> | (ii) Involvement in drug smuggling | <input type="text"/> |
| (iii) New life in catering       | <input type="text"/>           | (iv) Reading stories of himself    | <input type="text"/> |
| (v) Meeting a bad friend         | <input type="text"/>           | (vi) Being the owner of a business | <input type="text"/> |
| (vii) Decades of prison life     | <input type="text"/>           | (viii) Court's ruling of his crime | <input type="text"/> |



5. How old was Kurt when he did the interview with Theo?

5 You may need to do a calculation.

---

6. In each line, there MAY be a wrong word. If there is one, underline it and write a word that expresses the correct idea in the right-hand column. If not, put a tick (✓).

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| (i) Now the <u>helper</u> of a Chinese restaurant, Kurt first | <u>manager</u> |
| (ii) expressed his discontent to Theo and those in the        | _____          |
| (iii) same profession as he, in simpler terms, editors in     | _____          |
| (iv) general. In Kurt's opinion, it was the feature stories   | _____          |
| (v) they wrote that helped form a more unfavourable           | _____          |
| (vi) impression of him. That's because he described           | _____          |
| (vii) himself as an ugly duckling transferred into a swan.    | _____          |

## Part C Vocabulary Bank

Label the photos below with the names of illegal activities from the word box.

drug trafficking  
internet fraud

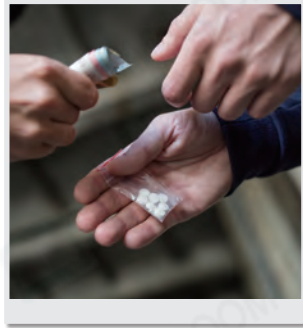
bogus begging  
pickpocketing

loitering  
unlawful assembly

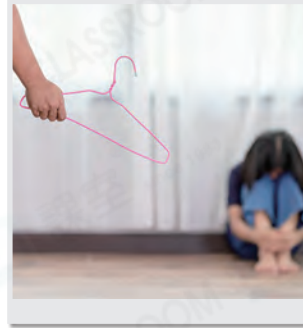
vagrancy  
child abuse



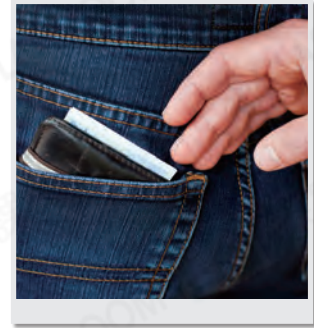
1. \_\_\_\_\_



2. \_\_\_\_\_



3. \_\_\_\_\_



4. \_\_\_\_\_



5. \_\_\_\_\_



6. \_\_\_\_\_



7. \_\_\_\_\_



8. \_\_\_\_\_

### Word Craft

**Jail** (Refer to P.48.)

**e.g.** be sent to **jail**  
get out of **jail**  
face **jail**  
be in **jail** for arson

### Let's Discuss!

1. Do you think the penalties for drug-related offences should be as harsh as those for violent crimes like murder?
2. In your opinion, why do ex-offenders usually have difficulty re-entering society?

## Part D Cloze Passage

Complete the notes on the bulletin board below with the appropriate words introduced on the previous page.



# Be informed. Be vigilant. Be safe.

The usual assumption about beggars is that they belong to the poorest and most unfortunate class of a society. This may be true of the real ones. But some of them (a great number actually) are scams. Neither homeless nor particularly poor, they make a fortune out of (1) \_\_\_\_\_. Don't become a generous sponsor of their businesses with your donation.

It is stated in the laws of Hong Kong that when three or more people get together and behave in such a way as to disturb the public order and induce fear, the group is taking part in an (3) \_\_\_\_\_. This colonial-era law has been used to deal with triads.

(5) \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the act of living on the street and begging from people. Though it is not treated as an offence by law in Hong Kong, (6) \_\_\_\_\_, the act of remaining in an area for no apparent reason, is prohibited. So, don't be surprised when you see someone sleeping in some corners of a street; however, when you notice someone suspicious hanging around a place, remember to stay alert, and most importantly, stay away.

(2) \_\_\_\_\_, more than merely possessing the substance, is a serious crime and will put you under risk of decades of jail, in the worst scenario, life imprisonment and a fine of five million Hong Kong dollars.

As long as you are out on a crowded street, you are under the threat of (4) \_\_\_\_\_. Keep an eye on your personal belongings. Make sure your bags are securely zipped and never let them be left unguarded.

It is true that education is more effective when the pupils are still open to influence—that is, when they are young. This does not mean that physical punishment should be inflicted mindlessly on them. Doing so may get yourself arrested on the criminal charge of (7) \_\_\_\_\_. Worse still, needless to say, it is bound to have a lasting damaging effect on the child's psychological and physical development.

Although it is fine to make new friends and chat with them online, be wide awake when the person on the other side asks about your personal or financial information. Don't trust their honeyed words easily. (8) \_\_\_\_\_ is commoner than many expect it to be.