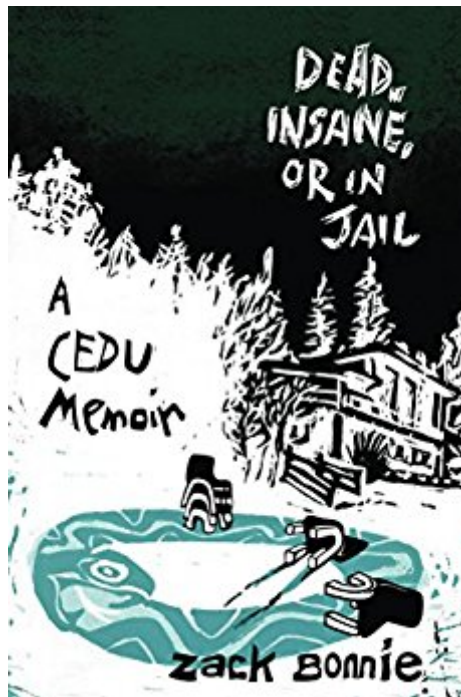




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Dead, Insane, Or In Jail: A CEDU Memoir



Synopsis

Zack Bonnie was fourteen when his parents sent him to a "Troubled Teen" facility. The author takes readers there, in a thrilling psychological read. Sequestered where bizarre cult-like techniques become the norm, see for yourself exactly what the controversy is about. Should we mold a child's behavior using the tools of brainwashing? With coarse, brutal dialog and authentic source materials, this nonfiction memoir, the first in a series, exposes the secrets and tells it all. *Dead, Insane, or in Jail: A CEDU Memoir* is named for the range of options open to the author at 14, if he ran away from the cult his parents inadvertently inducted him into. This is the first time he has told his story. And it's a doozy. Too many people can relate to this account, unfortunately. Although Rocky Mountain Academy has closed its doors, several hundred residential teen-treatment programs, religious reeducation camps, and places that commit spiritual assassination still operate without oversight in the United States. Imagine (or remember) being a confused teenager. Now imagine that the only solution your parents can devise is sending you away to be "fixed."

Zack's touching, true account of being trapped in the "scared straight" industry just might be the book your reluctant teenage reader has been seeking. Barbara J. Danis, Literacy Specialist / Coach Zack Bonnie's work is a gift to those interested in the history and dynamics of coercive residential teen-treatment programs. With gut-level insight, humor and frankness, he describes the inner experience of a precocious 14 year-old who was engulfed and overwhelmed by these bizarre, yet legal, forms of psychological abuse. Marcus Chatfield, Author, *Institutionalized Persuasion* It is sad the abuse of teenagers to tough love programs by mis-informed parents and politicians did not end with the revelations concerning the concept originator Synanon. To be stopped eventually, stories like this must keep being told. Paul Morantz, Esq. Author, *Escape: My Life Long War Against Cults* It's often hard to describe how traumatic and damaging "troubled teen" programs for young people are. This important perspective from someone who lived it offers a vivid portrait of hell that is sold as therapy. Maia Szalavitz, Author, *Help At Any Cost: How the Troubled-Teen Industry Cons Parents and Hurts Kids* In the tradition of *Darkness At Noon*, Zack's history puts the reader into the life that too many "survivors" experienced, and he does this in a finely crafted page-turner. Philip Elberg, Esq. Zack Bonnie's memoir is a riveting tale of shame, intimidation, coercion, and frank abuse in the name of "treatment." The continued existence of programs like CEDU should be considered a national disgrace. Christopher Bellonci, MD Zack Bonnie's book sheds light on the larger concerns of many families, then and now. Well-meaning parents are vulnerable to programs like Rocky Mountain Academy. Although it was closed years ago, many

more such facilities have been established. These schools and programs take good money from families, and harm their children, all the while masquerading as therapy programs. I join Zack in advocating for regulation and reform so that facilities like RMA can no longer manipulate and harm entire families. Robin C Bernhard, LCSW, MEd, BCN Thank you, Zack. Your book succeeds on so many levels – as autobiography, as social criticism, as just a good story – I hope you make a million dollars. John Bodine, Rocky Mountain Academy Alumnus

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Customer Reviews

At times this book was hard to get through, but only because it was so effective in bringing me back to the mindset of being an adolescent (having also been a freedom-craving explorer and experimenter in my own youth), and because it imparted so well the atmosphere and abusive tactics at CEDU. My inner adolescent (still a person I carry with me, and value, and sometimes need to listen to) wanted to scream and choke those people, wanted to shout all the terrible things about them, wanted to run away, but I had to just keep reading the book. Without offering any spoilers,

there is some redemption and a sort of emotional resting spot in the last part of the book. Stick with it!! I never had a clue what these kinds of "schools" were like, though I knew a few kids who were sent away to probably very similar places when I was in high school in the 70s. I was one of the lucky ones, simply left home at 17 yrs old and managed to find my way - stumbling at times, railing at society and the system (to this day), self-harming at times, but free. I look forward to reading future installments of Zack Bonnie's story, to learn how his path unfolded. I recommend this book for combining important exposé with a really gripping tale of personal experience. Love the person your adolescent really is, parents.

Zack Bonnie does a superb job of describing the verbal and emotional abuse that my own son experienced at Rocky Mountain Academy. This school has since been forced to close its doors, but in the interim has done untold damage to scores of troubled youth whose parents shipped them off to a place that was supposed to be a safe haven but turned out to be a house of horrors. It is unlikely that any of their parents would fly into a rage if their son or daughter dirtied the bathroom mirror while flossing their teeth. Nor would they gather them in groups with their friends so they could verbally abuse each other until they reduced one another to tears. Nor would they entice young girls to fondle themselves in order to drive the boys crazy and then tell them not to touch each other or encourage the boys to vent their sexual frustrations with other boys. Yet all of these parents paid dearly for the privilege of having unqualified staff with their own troubled backgrounds do these very things and much worse. If parents did these things to their own children in their own homes, they would no doubt receive a visit from the local police. But RMA staff could get away with it because they were miles from the nearest town in a secluded location with no supervision. What a relief that one responsible parent finally took them to court and shut them down.

Dead, Insane, or in Jail is a riveting and disturbing book that illustrates how terribly wrong things can go when adolescents, no matter how "troubled" or difficult to deal with, are seen as individual problems to be solved, rather than part of a larger community and system that needs help functioning collectively. Zack's description of his experiences at CEDU and SUWS are upsetting, though not entirely surprising, having had a few friends in high school who were sent to similar programs. I did learn in far more detail the myriad ways in which kids are broken down and emotionally brutalized in the name of "therapy" (and I say this as someone who firmly believes in the power of good therapy). The idea that these programs are staffed by people with little to no training as therapists or educators, who are then given free reign to work with children at the most

vulnerable stage of their development is truly upsetting. Even more so is the description of how completely cut off from their families these kids were, with no notion that the entire family system needs to work on their collective problems - leaving these kids to believe that their emotional turmoil and troubled behavior is entirely their own fault and responsibility. I applaud Zack for his ability to tell his story with openness and honesty and his willingness to relive and recount these traumatic experiences for the sake of educating others about this dangerous industry. I look forward to the next installment in the series.

Zack Bonnie's heart-wrenching memoir is one of the most powerful books I've read in a long time, and this is just the first book in the series. As a troubled and defiant 14-year old, his parents chose to ship him off to a boot camp of sorts - a school for behavior modification, which was actually a cult-like community with devastating psychological mind control to break the spirit of the kids. There were parts that were difficult to read, that I had to scan, and several f-bombs, but the accurate story couldn't be told without those things. What was most heartening to me is that the author survived the horror and that he wrote about it both as catharsis for himself, and to help others. And from reading his bio, that he found his true self despite the pain. I am waiting for the next book, eager to see the ending unfold. Thank God this RMA place is out of business! I am hopeful that the message of this book exposes any other such schools that still exist.

The story line of this compelling memoir inspired me to write a review. The author adeptly peels away layers and layers of secret spiritual abuse often witnessed in the same manner in which cults are shaped. As disturbing and distressing as it is to read, it is a daring and courageous move by the author to expose many harmful practices still permitted to be applied, under the guise of treatment today. As a sociologist who had heard of ritualistic attack therapies, I thought I knew what I was getting into when opening this book. I am reviewing it because I was inspired by the encompassing messages embedded in Mr. Bonnie's memoir. I learned what goes on behind closed doors revealing untold human rights violations for children. I encourage all those interested in changing the trajectory of prisons for profit to read this powerful book. Institutions like CEDU must have regulatory eyes over their shoulders at all times or be shut down completely. Margaret Turner, Ph.D.

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