

## Dead, Insane, or in Jail: A CEDU Memoir

*Zack Bonnie*

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### **Dead, Insane, or in Jail: A CEDU Memoir Zack Bonnie**

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**

In the years of composing DIJ it became clear that there was lack of detailed information from the inside, and from a young person's point of view, that would ever be considered accurate. I wanted to close the gap and disrupt the secrecy. I wanted to document, in the most realistic way that words would allow, my memories of the time I was at RMA. **Zack Bonnie, Author, Dead, Insane, or in Jail: A CEDU Memoir**

## **Dead, Insane, or in Jail: A CEDU Memoir Details**

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## **From Reader Review Dead, Insane, or in Jail: A CEDU Memoir for online ebook**

### **Staci Baker says**

#### **I couldnt put it down!**

This book was eye opening. It's amazing and horrible that places like this exist and that the staff actually think they're helping. Zack does a great job telling about the horror he endured in the name of therapy.

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### **Ilyse says**

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.

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### **Jeff Lewonczyk says**

So full disclosure, I was friends with Zack in college and so am completely biased. That said, reading his book was - well, I hesitate to call it a "pleasant" surprise, considering the subject matter, but it was eye-opening in pretty much every respect - not only in terms of the content, but in its revelation of a vital new autobiographical voice.

First of all, there's the story he has to tell - a memoir about landing at a remote school for "troubled teens" that used a rubric of tough love to camouflage a festering viper fit of mind-control intimidation techniques, attempting to break down the personalities of the young people sent there in order to make them theoretically more acceptable to society at large - a twilight world about which I knew nothing and am disturbed to cover existed.

But beyond simply the tale, there's the telling - Zack has pulled off the feat of completely inhabiting his 14-year-old self in prose, evoking in the reader the same disorientation, bewilderment and fear that he experienced after being summarily dropped in this hellhole by his well-meaning but uninformed parents. He convincingly immerses you in the spiral of weirdness and terror that occurs when the usual seismic changes of adolescence unfold in a freaky, cult-like environment. Zack's summoning of himself from 27 years ago is an uncanny conjuring, which provides humor and hope in a story that would otherwise have been almost too dismal to bear.

This is Zack's latest salvo in an ongoing effort to focus scrutiny these institutions, which apparently continue to crop up in different guises well into the 21st Century. The whole project shines a light on a corner of the world you may not have thought about before, but won't be able to forget - telling in the process an urgent true-life story with vivid characters and incidents that will force you to question the systems we live in and make you grateful for the small freedoms we manage to eke out each day. Highly recommended (personal bias and all).

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### **Carolyn O'Neal says**

Both the good and the frustrating part of "Dead, Insane, or in Jail" is that it relies on what could be an unreliable narrator to tell the story. If this were fiction, I would go along with the ride. But being nonfiction, I am constantly trying to second guess the motives of the parents. Are Zack's parents neglectful? Cruel? What did Zack do to deserve this abandonment? He is only 14 years old yet has had experiences most 19 year old have never had - sex, drugs, world travel. Did he grow up too fast? Or not fast enough? Had he been a 14 year old today, would he have been medicated instead of sent away?

I hope these questions are answered in upcoming books. The troubled teen industry exists for a reason. Like war, it may be a bad reason, but still a reason. This book does parents a great service in exposing the industry's lack of professional standards.

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### **Hillary says**

I will start this review by saying that I won this book through a goodreads giveaway from the author.

I heard a lot of good things about this book before I started to read it, so I was excited when I realized that it surpassed my expectations.

It is a well written memoir about truly unbelievable events in a young boy's life. I did not have much knowledge on the troubled teen industry before reading this book and this book has widened my horizons as to look into it and understand it.

The author writes with so much detail, you forget that he is telling a story about when he was fourteen. The letters and notes that he adds in the book add to it's authenticity and it sent shivers down my spine reading the actual words that were exchanged between him and his peers/family/counsellors etc.

The events that occurred in the book really gives you an understanding of how strong the author was when he had so much to deal with. As soon as you feel the story is coming to a calmer point, there's a plot twist and the drama starts right back up again and you won't want to put the book down.

I am a huge fan of memoirs and have read many of them. I am definitely going to be read this one multiple times. I would recommend this memoir to literally anyone, young and old...whether you know about the troubled teen industry or not. It will surely teach you a thing or two about it and it will leave you shocked and wanting to read more about what might have happened next.

I heard that this book is the first book of a trilogy..I really hope it is because I will definitely be looking forward to continuing reading what else happened to him on his journey in his next books.

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### **Lora says**

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

I'm not sure what I would have done in place of Zack's parents, but CEDU was not the answer. I felt like the program he was sent into was like getting insane people to cure the sane. I'll admit that I was pretty confused during some parts of the book, but maybe I was supposed to feel that way since surely Zack was feeling that way at the time. I think it's great that he's raising awareness that parents are paying (and paying well) to have their children abused. That's never the way to straighten out troubled youth.

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### **Erik says**

Back when I was in high school 30+ years ago, a fellow student was removed from school mid-term by his parents and sent to some kind of troubled-teen program to be "straightened out." We didn't know each other well, but I knew enough about him to understand that he was not unusual in any way as far as rebellion, drugs, grades, etc were concerned. This was in northern Virginia, an area stuffed to the brim with government and military families, so we all just assumed he was normal but his parents were rigid, overbearing assholes.

We were kids, what did we know?

He was gone for about half of the school year before reports reached our school that he'd escaped. With that news, he became an overnight hero. When he was found/caught/whatever I guess he wasn't sent back because not long after escaping he was back in northern Virginia. In that regard, he had it better than Zack Bonnie, author of this book. I'm not sure what kind of facility or program my classmate was sent to, but if it's anything like RMA or SUWS, I can see why he escaped. Holy crapola.

No doubt about it, this book is damning in the highest degree. As much as I can see intense therapies like the ones in the book helping *some* people (I confess, mid-way through I found myself getting some accidental therapy just from reading about the "raps"), the methods that are employed are tricky and dangerous and seem like really, *really* bad ideas in general. And the lack of autonomy and respect for the kids...talk about being treated like a prisoner. Horrible, just horrible.

Yeah, this book was good. Zack puts you in RMA, sprays you with Darlayne's spit, dehydrates you in the middle of nowhere with no water in sight, banishes you to solitary confinement, starves you, doesn't let you pee, and yells at you for doing the wrong thing no matter what it is you do (Marathon Man, anyone? "Is it safe?"). This book is brutal. Other than a bit of excess sentimentality in the early pages, it's a 293-page-long

raw nerve.

That said, it's also entertaining. Zack knows how to tell a story. I'm not sure if I'm going to continue reading the series (more of the same? I don't know if I can take it), but I'm damn glad I read this part of it. It's a hell of a story, and even if my high school classmate went somewhere other than RMA or SUWS, I feel like I got a taste of what he went through. I appreciate that. Folks need to know what these programs were (and in some areas, still are) all about.

(Full disclosure: I received this book from Goodreads Giveaways in exchange for an honest review. And I respect our military. That too.)

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## **Darlene says**

I won this book through a Goodreads giveaway.

Going into this, I had no idea what CEDU schools were, or anything about the "troubled teen industry." I found myself entertained by the story and writing style, as well as shocked that this entertaining "story" was someone's life. I kept thinking to myself that if I were in Zack Bonnie's shoes I would have gone INSANE! He handled his situation way better than I would have. It is beyond me why the types of "therapy" depicted in this book could be considered helpful to anyone. I am also shocked that parents didn't seem to do any research into the credentials of the people administering the "therapy" (hint: they didn't have any).

One thing I found especially interesting was the letter in the book from Bonnie's father. It was nice to hear his perspective on the situation, looking back on the events, and hindsight being 20/20.

I do wish some photos would have been included in the book (if any exist).

Since reading this I have delved into learning about CEDU and other methods of "therapeutic schools." It doesn't seem like that much information is available, which is a shame because I feel like people should know about this.

I would completely recommend this book, and I look forward to the second book in the series.

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## **Reni559 says**

To the author-posed question of who this book is for. My answer: Most everyone? I feel like it's not just for adults, yet not just for kids; not just for fact-seekers, yet not just for fiction/drama-seekers. The writing manages to reach this rare middle-ground that can capture any audience, with a merged style of theater and truthful detail.

I don't think you have to be a parent to be disturbed by what's going on behind the scenes. After seeing the full detail of how manipulative and seemingly benign and "helpful" the staff personalities can be, I'm disturbed now knowing how this can happen so easily with so many smiles in our direction.

I'm a fiction writer myself, so I also look at these kinds of books in terms of plot vs character development. Other Survivor books I've read feel detached to some extent, if not a great extent, due to the Survivor's experience being too difficult to face, or they didn't have a journal like he did, or were too young to be self-

aware, or simply due to the (POOR!) choice of hiring a ghost writer - which gives their supposedly emotional book too much of a sterile clean-cut professional feel rather than a raw experience. The rawness is well-written, showing a detail of human experience we otherwise rarely get to see the juice of, just the meat. I love nothing more than subtle detailed nuances, how even the act of waking up in bed can be a disturbing experience, waking INTO a nightmare rather than FROM one. Every paragraph is just that, detailed and disturbing.

Then there's the "show don't tell" aspect of fiction writing that is so well-played in this non-fiction book. It's a linear story about him as he experiences it, much more like a story than memoir, yet still true, and there's considerably less "telling" than with most other books I've read, fiction or non. I feel this also makes it readable by everyone because it's written in a simple-to-understand way where you get to FEEL with him exactly how insane the place is, rather than being TOLD.

I also loved how at first the dialogue was a little confusing with new terms, and why people are suddenly terrified or crying before anything has happened. The confusion seemed clearly intentional to me. I enjoyed that tactic because that's exactly the confusion he must have felt when living it.

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## Ginger McNulty says

Wow! This book is what my dear big brother calls a "flop-over" As soon as you're done reading the last page, you'll want to flop it over and read it again, knowing that it will be a different story, even more rich and more intriguing; minus the full force shock value and well communicated initial confusion; plus the added insight and understanding from the first run through.

Aside from the artwork, my favorite pages are the Introduction by Richard Bonnie and the final page, the Afterword.

I've read Dr. Bonnie's love letter to his son at least 5 times now and it still made my face leak. I'm tearing up a little now as I write this. Few of us program vets ever get such a solid and heartfelt apology, validation and vote of confidence from our families. Zack comes by his courage and compassion quite honestly, it seems.

The Afterword is an initial salvo in what I'm convinced will be a huge step in the growing movement to end this kind of treatment of human beings, most especially the unwitting harm done by well intended families, professionals and program staff deluded into believing that what they're doing is professional and therapeutic. Here is a brief excerpt from that page:

"Today, public, private, governmental, religious and 'treatment oriented' institutions are negatively effecting millions of lives. Young people deserve a protective standard to shield them from the corruption, predation and greed of systems and individuals meant to protect them! Teens have an affirmative right to develop into the persons they become without undue influence, and without threats to their individual autonomy and free expression.

"please join me as I build a personal strategy to these ends. ..."

I've always thought highly of Zack since I made his acquaintance some years ago on Fornits. He just became my road dog. I pledge from this day forward to do all that I can to help him realize his ambition.

## Anne Martin says

I've finished reading this amazing book -amazing in its original meaning, you are amazed because the story is almost unbelievable... I don't know what I think of it. The author declares it is his memoirs, with some names changed, to protect the memories of the others, dead or alive.

Is it possible? Can such a story be true? If it is, how come it did not make much, much more noise?

Or is it made up with kids trying to find repressed souvenirs, and fit their new discovered memories near the other ones, true or not true?

I still don't know what to think. While reading the book, I thought some reality sense would come to them, and many of those recovered memories will vanish. But no... it did not disappear.

Who went to these very special schools? were extra powers discovered? what is real, what is fiction?

The way the book has been cut to make it a series make me doubt of the complete authenticity of the story. Some parts are awfully long, a hundred pages for the prophet evening, some others are non existent, like what is school there?

I missed the information you wished to have from the parents, too. The reasons Zack is sent to this school are never clearly explained. He was not the nicest kid, but he was already in boarding schools, meaning he did not bother his parents too much. so, what happened?

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## Tom Schulte says

CEDU Educational Services, Inc., known simply as CEDU, was founded in 1967 by Mel Wasserman and his wife Brigitta. The company owned and operated several therapeutic boarding schools and behavior modification programs in California and Idaho. CEDU origins go back to Synanon, a cult founded in Santa Monica, California in 1958 by Charles Dederich. The Troubled Teen Industry[1] today largely consists of Synanon and/or CEDU offshoots. I thank this author for making me aware of CEDU and prompting me to go to the Web to learn about this. The author himself told me that of "CEDU and its roots in Synanon and the Troubled Teen Industry,... there's more and more information and articles out there." Now I am also intrigued about "Erhard seminar training or Landmark Forum." However, this book suffers I think from a lack of such historical context.

Well, that is judging is as a historical memoir.

As a thrilling tale that works well, as we are just as much at sea as the author when dropped off by his parents under false pretext and has no such context himself when demeaned in confrontational group therapy and other brainwashing-like, cultish settings even unto dining on raccoon and mouse in challenging "Wilderness Therapy".

As an attack on questionable "therapy" techniques I recall Sagan's *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* for his well-reasoned arguments for the damage such untutored approaches can wreak on the mind and soul. And that is one thing for adults voluntarily consenting to such activity, but hurling "troubled" teens into such a morass and severing ties to family, well, .... This should serve as a warning for any parent thinking of turning over their offspring to the Troubled Teen Industry.

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## **Claudia says**

The author has written a powerful story that deals with a very important issue. The troubled teen industry. Thousands of kids go through these programs without any chance to influence their own future, which is very disturbing and frightening. I highly recommend this book. Well written, it gives you the creeps and its unbelievable how these industries still exist.

Zack Bonnie Dead, Insane, or in Jail: A CEDU Memoir

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## **Tamara says**

This was a compelling book to read. I won it on Goodreads and it interested me because my professional role involves placing kids in residential treatment. This is a first-hand account of one person's experience in one of these facilities in the 1980's. I know that the treatment centers nowadays, at least the ones that I am familiar with, are nothing like the one described. I hope that these kind of places don't exist anymore, but they probably do.

At the CEDU place, the kids had their basic needs met, minimally at least - which wasn't true of the wilderness program that the author gets sent to towards the end. CEDU, as he portrays it, had a bizarre cult-like atmosphere, and seemed to run on the philosophy of some drug-treatment programs which use confrontation to destroy the person's sense of self and then build it back up. Most concerning to me was the fact that the counselors were kids or very young adults who had gone through the program, with no licensed clinician in sight.

It seemed like the program had some positive things to offer, if somebody could deal with all the crazy stuff. The author does hint at the end that he was finally able to use the program to turn his life around - but that story is saved for the next volume.

The writing is really that of a troubled 14-year old. There could have been some better editing, as the tale could have been told more succinctly. There were times that I was offended at the way he describes the body parts of his hated female counselor. There were times that I wished for an adult perspective.

All in all, a worthwhile, even important read, for people who work with troubled youth.

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## **Melody says**

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway. My opinion is just that...mine...and completely unbiased.

The landmines that Zack walked through in his mind in his young teens are the same ones that many before have walked, but Zack went one step further than a number of those young people.....he survived!

Those early teen years are a mystery for most of us. Who are we, what do we want to be, no, who do we want to be? Where do I fit in, CRAP...who are these people in my life and do I really want my life to turn out like theirs. No, I want to be "me", I want my "independence", I WANT!!!! Oh, but wait, there is so much more involved. You mean I have to conform to some rules, I have to be an active part of "your" lives, I have to play by rules? And then what happens when I "don't" fit in? I guess I rebel.

We may not realize that our "rebellion" affects so many around us at the time, but it does. Are these so called "programs for out-of-control teens" the answer? I think not. When there is no reasonable regulation you will run the gambit of bullying, mind control, physical abuse, sexual abuse, etc....the list could go on and on. Do I know the answer? HELL NO!! I do know as a mom, who had a couple of "rebellious" kids, and as a past rebellious teen myself, that life in those early teens is a very confusing time that needs not only patience and understanding, but limitations and yes, some discipline.

Zack has gone even further with his experience by being an active advocate for teens in these same situations. I applaud him for his efforts and hope that in this he has found some form of peace.

Thank you Zack for sharing your journey!

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