

## BOOK REVIEW

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### A Review of "We Mainline Dreams: The Odyssey House Story"

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REFERENCE: Densen-Gerber, J., *We Mainline Dreams: The Odyssey House Story*, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1973, 421 pages, \$9.95.

Ever so rarely does one find a book so unique that it should appeal to all disciplines of our Academy. It should also grip the attention of the general public, ranging from the adolescent to the sociologically minded adult, with satisfaction. This is a dynamically personal book on many levels—psychological, medical, political, and social. The author, Dr. Judianne Densen-Gerber, J.D., M.D. (a Fellow and proposed Dame of our Academy), projects her sociological philosophy into a workable program. *We Mainline Dreams: The Odyssey House Story* relates the story of Odyssey House, a drug rehabilitation program which began in 1967 with 17 addicts and \$3.82 and has progressed to its present growth of 33 facilities in six states.

The format of the book consists of narrative chapters by Dr. Densen-Gerber, interspersed with candid autobiographical chapters by ex-addicts and professionals. Odyssey House policy statements, schedules, and reports, as well as newspaper clippings, add to the overall understanding of Odyssey's program, even though I at times found them to be detrimental to the main consistent tempo of the psychological phenomenon of describing human interactions.

Autobiographical chapters include one by their medical director of services, Dr. Charles C. Rohr, and one by their organizational director, James P. Murphy, both members of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Both have been active in presenting papers and material at our annual meetings over the past several years, which added even more interest to the overall enjoyment of reviewing this book.

The material describing drug usage and addiction in children was most poignant and should be used as a constant reminder of the cost and results of the emotional and social deprivation of the ghetto.

Early in the book one is aware that the basic strength and adhesiveness of Odyssey is Dr. Densen-Gerber and her philosophy of life manifesting firm convictions. These convictions at times are in areas of marked controversial subject matter; that is, methadone main-

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tenance programs; but appear to be instrumental to the overall working of the Odyssey program. Her strength with Odyssey reminds me of the following poem:

I do not choose to be a common man—it is my right to be uncommon if I can.  
 I seek opportunity—not security.  
 I want to take the calculated risk, to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed, to refuse  
 to barter incentive for a dole.  
 I prefer the challenge of life to a guaranteed existence, the thrill of fulfillment to the state  
 calm of Utopia.

In short, *We Mainline Dreams* is a remarkably refreshing book which has much to offer anyone who is interested in the addictive problem of our present “drug culture.” The psychological effects from the “Group and Marathon” sessions to the verbalized insights of the ex-addicts offer valuable understanding of the turmoil of inner emotionality. Jimmy Murphy’s statement that, “At Odyssey we’re free of ambition at another’s expense,” could very well be the theme and goal of all growth patterns. Judges, prosecutors, probation workers, and ancillary workers can gain some insight into addicts’ warped reasoning when Fred Cohen, facing the judge and a prison sentence from 18–30 years when he was charged with six felonies, described his feelings as, “My infantile omnipotence was in full flower and I took it as a joke.” Louie Sarra’s analysis and insight into prison life should be of interest to all correctional and rehabilitation personnel.

The drug addiction problem has been classified as epidemic in nature in most large urban communities throughout the United States. This epidemic, which not only has a devastating effect on the human lives of the drug takers, also emotionally traumatizes and fragments families to irreparable states. At another level, the cost to society resulting from crimes committed for an addict to “survive” reaches astronomical figures. The average addict needs to steal \$50,000 worth of merchandise annually to maintain his habit. *We Mainline Dreams* states that, “Our Harlem storefront sees 450 raw addicts a month—these addicts are responsible for an estimated \$393,000,000 worth of crime in a year.” The combination of the above general factors makes *The Odyssey House Story* pertinent to all levels of our society.

This book has something for us all, whether we’re professionals working in the field, politicians formulating policies, addicts looking for the rudder of identification and hope, adolescents going through the identification turmoil, or families of addicts seeking guidance, as well as everyone interested in the complexity of human problems and interpersonal relationships.

In conclusion, I recommend that they “paperback” this book for more widespread distribution, for it has something to offer the general public in the pertinency of the topic and the clarity, insight, and realistic options given to it.