

**W Mainline Dreams (The Odyssey House Story).** By JUDIANNE DENSEN-GERBER. Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1973. Pp. 421. Price \$9.95.

This book details the astonishing battle that started in 1965 with a fistful of drug addicts led by Dr. Densen-Gerber and finds itself today a national organization considered by many the most persuasive force in the field of drug addiction therapy. It is always a bit awesome to look back to the invariably humble beginnings of any movement and wonder how it grew to such size and significance. Common sense tells us that groups like the Boy Scouts or the Red Cross, or just about anything you can name, started in small, stumbling steps. And if we think about it we can be sure each had its growing pains, its internal problems, its seceders, its dissenters, and probably its rebellions. Odyssey House was no exception.

Barely two years after their origin, in 1967, the Odyssey House group had their rebellion. It was labeled the "Great Split" and in a chapter under that title the entire details of that attempt to wrest control of the project from Dr. Gerber is laid out. The machinations are a bit hair-raising and sometimes inexplicable, or at least difficult to comprehend. For example an ex-patient named Tony, then Executive Director, led the revolt that callously tried to oust Dr. Gerber. During the time Tony was telling Dr. Gerber to quit the program, he was her private one-to-one psychiatric patient. Transference anyone? Obviously Dr. Gerber won her battle, but it was indeed a struggle.

The chapter dealing with the "Great Split" opens more fully the question of politics and power grabs and money greed that seems to surround many, if not all, governmental drug programs. Literally millions of dollars of good tax money are poured into these campaigns to help and heal the addicts. Misuse of funds and scandals abruptly reminds us that grasping, greedy parties thrive ribaldly among us who would treat the addicts, and many of the so called healers will pursue money with the same avidity the addicts chase heroin. This type of news produces the same wave of disgust and nausea in the average doctor as Lt. Calley's patrol activity at Me Lai produces in a World War II infantryman.

Parts of the story are told in very sensitive first person reactions of Dr. Gerber and certain selected patients. Reading these reactions tends to evoke strong identification with much of Dr. Gerber's anguish either with direct medical experiences of your own or intellectual projections and understandings of what she is trying to do in each given case. A very honest effort was made by Dr. Gerber to "let it all hang out," in the language of one of the cases, throughout the entire book.

You find yourself wondering what motivated her to continue with such tough, discouraging patient problems. I thought back on a few unsuccessful cases of heroin addiction treatment I was involved with and tended to admire her all the more. The longer I read the more I came to feel through this book's pages that this emotional, sensitive, dedicated doctor was also a pretty tough cookie; tough in the determined sense. Maybe I mean stubborn, or perhaps adamant. Whatever it was, the power comes through. You are on safe ground concluding this is not your average female who happened to go to medical school.

Naturally the technique employed in Odyssey's treatment is spelled out in exquisite bits. In essence it is a medical doctor's extension of the original Synanon method. Synanon eschewed the use of any medical doctors and just had their boarders kick "cold turkey" spurred on by the jeers and encouragements of ex-addicts who had gone through the same gauntlet. Odyssey is more sophisticated and noticeably better organized and run. It insists on complete and exacting urine checks on all members to make certain no drugs are being used. It has exacting in-take procedures and highly structured promotion levels and rewards. It has penetrating and demanding deep "probe" sessions that do emulate the early marathon Synanon ways, but here utilize psychiatric methodology as opposed to street wisdom.

Perhaps the most controversial point in Odyssey's treatment pattern is their disbelief in Methadone (dolophine). Dr. Gerber takes the position that Methadone is merely another form of potential addiction and likens its use to heroin's original use as a cure for morphine addiction; and we all know what happened there. Methadone is still a very accepted treatment

as Dr. Herbert Raskin's article in the August 1973 *Journal of Family Practice* reminds us, but the *Odyssey* people say it is not needed, necessary, or even helpful in treating drug addiction. They feel it causes more trouble than it is worth, so to speak. They feel their statistics prove it.

As I write this book review, New York State is on the verge of getting a new tough drug law (starts September 1, 1973). Newspapers, radio and television are warning the New Yorkers to be careful and authorities are telling everyone the new jail terms to be handed out. Addicts are warned to get into programs or go away for a long time, jail or another state, presumedly. Law enforcement men are flexing their muscles and plans are afoot to increase the number of courts and judges. Dean Robert McKay of New York University Law School feels the extra prisoners may "heat up the jail problem" again. Governor Rockefeller wants this new law and so he gets it.

The new heavy jail sentence law reflects many things besides the fact Governor Rockefeller may want to run for governor again. Not the least of the disillusionment has been the tremendous lack of successful results in treating drug addicts. It was in the early sixties in New York when we tried to move the drug problem out from under the police to the doctors. Here we are ten years later in New York pushing back toward police and jail. Who is to blame for all the incredible bungling that went on in between is anyone's guess but there is no doubt that most of the efforts were disastrous. In that light *Odyssey* stands out like a beacon on a foggy night.

Let me recommend this book for anyone with the slightest interest in drug addiction at any level. It is truly *sui generis* in its content and it is a large book extremely well produced. The type used is bold and easily readable. The paper stock is firm and substantial. The chapter head and the overall art work are excellent. The many and varied inserts supporting the content such as photographs, newspaper articles, pictures, documents, letters, etc., are well displayed and pertinently placed.

Yes, I would repeat. Anyone who may have to advise or refer any drug addict, or have to be knowledgeable on the subject of addiction and its treatment should very definitely read this book.

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