

“In general, we were treated the same”: An Interview with CEDU Counselor, Randolph Reynolds

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Medium Anonymous

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It's impossible to write a definitive account of CEDU without including the voice of its counselors. During the years investigating CEDU for my [article](#), I found a number of these individuals willing to lecture me, but refusing to go on record. By some miracle, in September 2018, a long-term counselor agreed to an interview.

Randolph Reynolds worked at CEDU's Running Springs facility from the late 1980s until the early 2000s. I remember him well. If CEDU staff functioned as our surrogate parents, Randolph was something like our hippie uncle. This isn't to suggest I admire him. He was a central figure at CEDU, and still a committed, unbudgeable follower. "[T]here was little wrong with the original methods," he wrote late in our conversation.

The incentive to interview Randolph Reynolds began when a fellow CEDU survivor shared a Polaroid he had rediscovered this past summer. In the photo, a middle-aged counselor with a horseshoe moustache runs his hand through a teenage boy's hair. The counselor gazes at the boy's face, grinning proudly and impishly. The boy, smiling less impishly, hooks his arm around the counselor and looks elsewhere. It's an arguably too touchy-feely image taken in what was already a handsy hell.

Incidentally, this is a photo of Randolph and me. I had never seen it before, and decided to contact the man who once played with my hair.

To get this out of the way: Counselor Randolph was an exasperating interviewee. After agreeing to a Q&A, I emailed eighteen questions. I expected him to send back the entire list answered. The hope was to have a swift, clean exchange — no more than four emails between us. But he answered in a slow trickle, often one question at a time, and had a habit of replying to his own extraordinarily misspelled emails with various digressions. Missing CEDU, he was clearly savoring the opportunity to reminisce.

Ultimately, it would take over three months and nearly 160 emails to end our correspondence. I remained anonymous throughout it all.

Randolph's responses are unedited. Where appropriate, though, I have inserted additional information. A condensed version of our written dialogue follows.

Medium Anonymous: *Starting with the easier stuff: What's your age? Are you still working? If so, where?*

Randolph Reynolds: 72...yes....tutoring parttime for private tutoring outfit

MA: *During my time, 1999–2000, I knew you as a counselor and an English teacher. What was your official position at CEDU? Were you ever a team leader? According to CEDU employment info, counselors supervised residents whereas team leaders supervised counselors as well as residents.*

RR: I had 2 stints at CEDU....quit the first time because I could not run raps...especially like Rudy...never did run tjem like Rudy but more like Dennis Docksteder...started out as flunkie in Discovery under Guy Bonono...hated it....in second stint was a teacher and a counselor...then family head asst. under Pam Abell....family head of ..whatever we were calling the "senior" class at the end....also worked with parents....ran Hilltop....helped run Family Groups ...

MA: *How long did you work at CEDU? From my understanding, you joined around 1987, left in 1989, then returned in the 1990s. Is that correct?*

RR: correct

MA: *How did you hear about CEDU? What about it called to you?*

RR: I was living in Crestline...read something about it....interviewed...hired on the spot, after Rudy walked into an unlocked restroom, where I was taking a shit and continued our conversation without midsing a beat...which impressed him..

Going back to how I found out and why I was attracted...first of all I HATE public education!!! hated being a student and I hated being a teacher...it is a totally fucked up system that only teaches submissiveness, obediendence and subjugation...pardon my spelling...even THINKING about it enrages me!!

So, I was looking for something that MEANT something...real education.....even as I drove up up that long driveway, I felt something....and as scared as I was in the initial interviews, this was what I had been looking for...now, as I said, I failed the first time. It hurts in at least two ways...first, I do not like failure...and I failed the first time...but, there was sometjng so special, so different from all the the "normal" school crap I had soooo hated all my life!

So, the setting called me to begin with....it was amazing...rather Mel choose it for that reason, I know not...plus, and this another..looong, discussion..the school had just bifurcated...due to philosophical (sic) differences...plus sexual shinadigans...some including

students....I need to stop...I had stopped thinking about some of this...and, some of it impacted on me

MA: *Prior to CEDU, had you worked at other residential treatment facilities for teenagers?*

RR: I worked with students thrown out of our local high school...pregnant and what not...I also taught youth at risk for Job Corps...then became drug counselor for them and finally, Academic Director

MA: *How would you describe CEDU, and its type of treatment, to the public?*

RR: Behavior modification....but in discussion with people I trusted, I said we were saving lives.

What was called "Raps" , I termed group therapy....I also believed what Mel told us in a workshop, you really on teach "who you are." to students.....I may have more to say on this one

MA: *CEDU was rather honest about staff and residents participating in the same therapeutic techniques together. For example, in 1996 CEDU employment info, a "willingness to share personal and emotional growth experiences" is a fully capitalized "REQUIREMENT." Similarly, in a tribute to CEDU's founder, Mel Wasserman, a staffer who "held many positions" from the mid-seventies to 1990 wrote: "a requirement for any new faculty member was full participation in the Cedu program of personal growth." In July, just a couple months ago, you wrote a comment on a CEDU Facebook group suggesting that "many staff hated that we were put thro all the same things [teenagers] were." Why did staff hate this aspect of CEDU?*

RR: I overstated when I said "many staff." However, this was hard work....you had to be honest and open and willing to look at parts of yourself that you would rather not. Co-counseling was not much fun either, plus, never really saw the benefit...but the other work helped me grow up and become a better person

MA: *Many team leaders and counselors had once been CEDU residents. Did they also hate re-experiencing what they underwent as teenagers?*

RR: I can only recall one exstudent on the staff...beautiful young lady who became Andy Grenier's lover...she was a great staff...did great raps....and we became friends after CEDU....BUT...she was also very paranoid..she was one of the students who ended up in Mel's hot tub and had sex with the staff....in the end, she had a complete breakdown...was convinced that the guy who picked up students..and was part owner...Bill Lane..was going to kill her and disappeared

[NOTE: *At this point, I reminded Randolph of numerous residents-turned-counselors during his years of employment. He didn't acknowledge this fact, but we did spend fifteen emails discussing the CEDU counselor, Andy Grenier, and his resident "lover." To respect her privacy, I'll call her "J." According to Randolph, Andy Grenier, a former drama teacher at Beverly Hills High School, "lived with" J while at CEDU. Randolph added that "Andy also dated a graduate within a year of her leaving CEDU..as well." From what Randolph remembers, J was a resident in the 1980s and a counselor until the very early 2000s. "[S]he was a victim and had the guts to come back and work there," Randolph wrote in a rare moment of accuracy. I don't remember J. But moved by her story — and eager to understand why she believed Bill Lane wanted her dead — I spent several weeks trying to track down her contact info. I was unsuccessful. I did, however, locate Andy Grenier on Facebook. I never met the man, he left before my time, but there are no marginal figures at CEDU. All of its predatory counselors deserve scrutiny. Grenier didn't respond to a request for comment. I also emailed Beverly Hills High School, trying to obtain any records about him. Beverly Hills High School didn't respond either.]*

MA: *Spread over the two-year term, propheets and workshops were the most important part of CEDU's emotional growth curriculum. These were grueling overnight or multi-day encounter groups. I participated in nearly all of them. The trouble is, I only have a few memories. And these memories are impossible to distill. Could you explain to me — and to a general reader — what propheets and workshops were?*

RR: *Oh dear,...that is an hour or more question....there were, what, 8 of them...let me meditate...I do have my I & Me journal...but my youngest daughter burned down the family compund 2 years back w/ most of my daily Journals*

[NOTE: *After expressing regret for his daughter's arson, I asked what years Randolph underwent CEDU's seven propheets and two workshops. "Went through a few of the early ones in 1987–1989...did the heavier ones, 1995–2002," he wrote. Because Randolph voluntarily experienced in nine years what an adolescent was forced to endure in two, and because I've gloriously blocked out my propheet memories, I asked for official confirmation that staff experienced LGATs alongside residents. This was his answer: "Correct.....we went thru the emotional growth rigors as the students.....we were also confronted in raps....not always and some staff conned their way thro raps...but in general, we were treated the same"]*

MA: *In the Facebook comment I quoted earlier, you also mentioned hating a propheet called "The Childrens." However, you add that "in the end, it changed my life for the better." It made you a complete human, you said, as well as an adult. In a separate Facebook comment, you go further: "I would not be alive or happy, without going thro the Propheets." How did these seminars change your life?*

RR: Well, many ways.....I changed my name for one thing...in the last one...after about 2 hours of intense pressure facing the ENTIRE staff!...Also, I faced and moved past issues with my parents....in particular, my Dad....who I had never known I HAD issues with (not counting the Vietnam War....I cried long copious wailing over other issues I had never faced or knew I had...I bonded with the other members of my "team"...deeper than you would think possible...still very close with some of them.....I learned Tools I still use to get thru life

MA: *I was pulled from the program and missed "the Summit," CEDU's final workshop. You've written about how "some staff walked out of the Summit" and considered it yourself. Why were staffers walking out? And why didn't you?*

RR: Because you not only had to reveal everything about yourself, work on difficult issues, listen to intense feedback for hours.....I had left CEDU once, and felt a failure and was determined to go all the way and it was worth it.

MA: *Bill Lane, CEDU's former president, was recently interviewed by Lon Woodbury, CEDU's former Admissions Director. The topic: "From Synanon to CEDU." According to Lane, who was one of Synanon's first and youngest members, that program's large-group awareness training, "the Trip," was CEDU's propheets. Bill Lane made them seem interchangeable. Did you have any experience with Synanon or its "Trips"? If so, do you agree with Lane's interpretation?*

RR: Only from what I heard from other staff....and the fact that CEDU originally was a heavy drug rehab place and Mel used Synanon methods, apparently. I did go to Esalen..and there were similarities there.

In case you don't know, Mel developed the Propheets based on things he learned from Lufe Springs and Esalen...I even went to Esalen once to check that put...they had a sort of "rap"...but nowhere near as intense....but the way the place was run in general was CEDUish....

: Did you ever meet Esalen's co-founder, Michael Murphy?

RR: No...meet Timothy Leary....and his opponent in this debate, Gordon Liddy....Liddy stayed and responded to all questions...while Leary, stalked off in colorful scarves and cute ladies..I also met Crosby at a CEDU graduation, because he was there for Jackson Brown's son who graduated...his black Beamer's License plate read "Cros"..

Meet Neil Diamond....his son was there....fell in love with my oldest daughter...he was so small and shy at graduation...meet Rod Stewart....there with his fourth blond bimbo wife...and a totally fucked up stepchild..

Had to have lunch with Dudley Moore...with another fucked up stepkid

But my favorite famous meet was with Phil Knight...he has 2 sons...one...handsome, smart..went to Yale..the other..weird, pudgy, not quite right, was sent to Hilltop, while I was running it..adult CEDU, if you will...so, I have Phil Knight in my office crying his eyes out wanting help with his odd son...we, actually, failed in the end

MA: *Throughout CEDU's history, you've mentioned that "there were at least 4 regimes." Who — or what — caused these regime changes? What sort of differences did you notice as a result? How did a new regime impact the counseling staff?*

RR: two regimes to my knowledge....as I said, and this is only a guess....but since the breakup was acrimonious, I think it was due to the sexual and other powertrips that occurred. I latter applied at the other school....it was run by the staff who walked Out of the Summit....it was a close copy of CEDU in all ways

[Note: *By "the other school," Randolph is referring to Mount Bachelor Academy in Oregon. This program closed in 2009 after decades of rampant child abuse.]*

MA: *It seems throughout its history, and at each campus, CEDU had specific team leaders — often one male and one female — unofficially running the show. Can you talk about the hidden power structure that occurred with staff?*

RR: it was team leader and assistant team leader....in general, there were simply equals, that were "more" equal.....some, because they were more talented...Pamela Abell....some, because they were gifted or trained actors...Rudy Bentz, Andy Griener....or just used powerful voices and intimidation...Russ Decker....or kindness and empathy...Dennis Docksteder and me

MA: *A complex array of punishments awaited residents who broke a complex array of rules. If staff were put through the same program as us, were they punished too? In July, you commented on Facebook that a powerful counselor once "made me saw wood for HOURS. along side Discovery students." Was that a punishment? If so, for what?*

RR: the wood sawing was merely part of Discovery...beginning level then...and Guy Bonnano....cut right along next to us...tho he was twice my size!...the only staff "punishment" was being fired or not promoted....there WERE unfair practices, depending on power structure....but in the main.....it was much fairer and egalitarian than most jobs....harder too!

[NOTE: *Randolph followed this answer with an image of a bloody guillotine. "Hopefully that guillotine is not meant for the questioner," I wrote. He replied: "No....you WANTED to see CEDU's punishment!!"]*

MA: *Has your view of CEDU changed since its 2005 closure? What do you think its legacy is?*

RR: no.....I miss it very much...and have almost weekly CEDU dreams...usually where it is open again....others, especially ex-students have these dreams as well..there is a small group of students who still hate their experiences...but most, including ALL, I am still in contact with, value their time there

there was little wrong with the original methods..I believe that the further away we got from Mel's initial ideas and guidance, the weaker the program was...he flew us all up to Idaho and gave lectures to us for days and entertained us, besides. The Mission was so clear...we all went back imbued with powerful feelings and ideas...but that only lasted so long..he said "sometimes the magic doesn't work"..and "It seemed like a good idea at the time." I think the third aphorism was about a country being pushed further and further away from their land..etc...until the leader took out the sword and drew a line in the sand and said, "from this place, we will not retreat!"

[NOTE: *Confused by his response, Randolph said he was "trying to describe the 3rd thing Mel told us in his seminar." This one, Randolph wrote, was about "ancient European people..who were driven from their home lands and pursued by superior forces...finally, their leader took his sword, and drew a line in the earth and said, 'We will not move from here!' Mel was saying sometimes, despite adversity or the odds against you, you have to take a stand."*]

MA: *CEDU was a vehemently sexless culture. Kissing another teenager was a punishable act. One would be punished just for admitting to thinking about kissing another resident. And yet everyone participated in smooshing — forced group cuddling. Complicating matters, in the late 1960s, CEDU allegedly held rampant orgies. This was such a strong allegation, in 1969 — according to a Desert Sun ad — CEDU's "young people" appeared on a weekly news show to confront the issue of whether the program was a "hotbed of sex orgies." And in our Q&A, you've mentioned sexual shenanigans, relationships, and "sex with staff" still occurring in later eras. From your experience, what was CEDU's view of sex? What was the program trying to teach adolescents about sexuality?*

RR: Well, first of all....you do not trap a bunch of teenagers together at the top of a mountain and not expect kissing and even sex.....Having said that, the policy evolved through the years..and keep in mind, there were daily "smush piles" where both sexes laid on the floor like puppies or sprawled over one another, on Coaches...in public. By the time I was a team leader, there was sanctioned dating for the "senior" class. There were consequences for romantic or sexual acting out. Bans to begin with... Certain students were forbidden even to TALK to students they had been caught kissing .etc...put on long "full times" where they could not talk to ANYONE...placed at a table in the dining room, where staff and some older students would lecture them and put on work assignments....one poor kid...forgot his name ...had to dig out a fairly large tree stump by

hand...took nearly a month...there was also Last Light confessionals...one guy had to stand in front of the whole house and admit and apologize for stealing a girl's panties from the girl's dorm

To answer your very last question...love, respect and sexual equality!

MA: *Was CEDU's treatment more effective for adults? Put another way, you voluntarily participated in propheets and workshops over nine years well into your adulthood. I went through them involuntarily over sixteen months as a freshman and sophomore in high school. Is there any way we could have experienced, and benefited from, the program similarly?*

RR: So many nuances to this..First, let me tell you that drempt last night was put on a fulltime...at that first table on the upper level of the dining room!

So, there were students who resisted fully participating in Propheets..etc...same, went for staff...some just faked it...there was an expression we used ...I can't recall it...but it meant tje bought in or were invested in the process..I know that some of us were..Dennis...me....but more just were acting....changed my life...I bought in....took me two stints....I resigned the first time around because I did not feel I was performing up to snuff..

Thus, there were many students who bought in....know many of them today...does not mran they were always happy about tje process...but they were happy in the main...we saved lives!!..and the most of the ones I still know, are happier NOW, as a result of it...me, included

MA: *I need to push back a little on this. Whether in propheets or just day-to-day CEDU life, every single child had to invest — and cooperate — in the process. No one could be noncommittal. There simply wasn't a choice: those who resisted were punished. As discussed earlier, counselors and team leaders offered an extreme variety of punishments. For example, according to a 2004 report from the California Department of Social Services, a resident was "not provided appropriate meals for at least three days." The evaluation report states that this was "a usual practice for any children who do not comply with the facility program." For the record, I'm not suggesting you oversaw a punishment like the one CDSS described. I'm merely pointing out that everyone participated. Eventually, we all bought in. I realize I don't have a question here. If you'd like to respond, though, I welcome it.*

RR: I disagree completely with this and in all my years there NEVER saw food withheld!

MA: *You wouldn't have. This common punishment, according to the California Department of Social Services, occurred at CEDU Middle School. I only learned about it from state records research. My larger point, however, was every child had to invest and comply with a program that also functioned as our home. There wasn't another choice for us.*

[NOTE: *At this point, Randolph refused to believe CEDU Middle School improperly fed non-complying residents. It “seems behind bogus,” he wrote. He also suggested that “SOMEONE is lying!!” Randolph claimed he “was often lent to the Middle School for Propheets etc” and “saw how the MS was run...these kids were MUCH more carefree and unstressed than high school.” I reminded him that CEDU Middle School residents were frequently physically restrained. I then sent him part of the evaluation report regarding children not being “provided appropriate meals for at least three days.” The report emphasized a Type A citation, issued for the most serious violations. Counselor Randolph did not respond to this fact.]*

-January, 2019