**Ken Kesey, *OFOTCN*, [De]institutionalization**

**Ken Kesey**

* Born Kenneth Elton Kesey in La Junta, Colorado to dairy farmers Geneva and Frederick A. Kesey.
* September 17, 1935 – November 10, 2001
* American novelist, essayist and countercultural figure
* Grew up in Springfield, Oregon. Kesey was a champion wrestler and almost made the Olympic team.
* He considered himself a link between the Beat Generation of the 1950s and the hippies of the 1960s.
* Graduated from the University of Oregon in 1957 with a BA in speech and communication.
* While there, he eloped with his high school sweetheart, Norma “Faye” Haxby, who he had met in 7th grade.
* They had three children: Jed, Zane and Shannon. Faye and Ken were together until he died.
* With Faye’s permission, he had a daughter with Carolyn “Mountain Girl” Adams, a fellow Merry Prankster. They called her Sunshine Kesey and she was raised by Adams and her stepfather, Jerry Garcia.
* He also attended Stanford University and completed a graduate fellowship in creative writing.
* While at Stanford, he volunteered for an experimental program at the the local Veterans’ Administration Hospital to test the effects of newly discovered drugs, LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, cocaine, aMT, and DMT, on people. This program turned out to be a CIA funded Project MKULTRA.
* During this time, he discovered LSD and became very interested in alternative methods of perception.
* He took a job at a mental institution.
* While working there and after finishing his creative writing program, he began writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* in 1960. It was based on his experiences and conversations with the patients.
* He even persuaded a friend to give him shock treatment so that he could describe its effects.
* OFOTCN was an immediate commercial and critical success when published two years later (1962).
* After publishing the book and the money it gave him, he moved to La Honda, California and bough a farm. He hosted parties with colleagues from Stanford (mostly msicellaneous bohemian and literary figures, for example Neal Cassady) and other friends.
* They called themselves the Merry Pranksters. The parties were called Acid Tests and combined the consumption of LSD with multimedia performances. He also mentored the Grateful Dead, which was considered the house band of the parties.
* He believed that altered states of mind could improve society, and found himself at the center of a growing drug cult of the 60s.
* Accounts of this time can be found in some of Allen Ginsberg’s poems, and Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.
* 1964 – The Merry Pranksters took a road trip across the country in a bus called Further. It was their attempt to create art out of every day life, but also to experience roadway America while high on LSD.
* 1965 – Kesey arrested in California for possession of marijuana.
* He tried to mislead the police by faking suicide and having his friends leave his truck on a cliffside road near Eureka along with a note written by the Pranksters.
* He fled to Mexico, but returned to the USA eight months later.
* January 17th, 1966 – Sentenced to six months in jail.
* Two nights later arrested with Carolyn Adams while smoking marijuana on a rooftop.
* When he was released, he moved back to the family farm in Oregon and spent the rest of his life there, writing many articles, books, and short stories.
* 1984 – Jed Kesey, 20, received severe head injuries in a car accident on a way to a wrestling tournament. He was declared brain-dead two days later, and his parents gave permission for his organs to be donated. Kesey blamed policies that deprived the team of funding, and later donated $33,395 to purchase a proper bus for the school’s wrestling team.
* 1992- Diagnosed with diabetes
* 1994 – Toured with the Merry Pranksters performing a musical play he wrote about the millennium called *Twister:* *A Ritual Reality*.
* 1998 – His health problems weakened him and he suffered a stroke.
* October 25, 2001 – Kesey had surgery on his liver to remove a tumor, but he did not recover from the operation.
* November 10, 2001 – He died at age 66.

***One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest***

* Published 1962
* Set in an Oregon psychiatric hospital.
* The narrative serves as a study of the institutional processes and the human mind.
* *Time* magazine included the novel in its “100 Best English-language Novels from 1923-2005” list.
* In 2003, it was listed on the BBC’s The Big Read poll of the UK’s 200 “best-loved novels.”
* Published in 1962 in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and deep changes to the way psychology and psychiatry were being approached in America.
* 1960s – Beginning of the controversial movement towards deinstitutionalization, which would have affected the characters of the novel.
* It is a direct product of his time working the graveyard shift as an orderly at a mental health facility in Menlo Park, California. He spoke with patients and witnessed the workings of the institution, but he also took psychoactive drugs including mescaline and LSD with Project MKUltra. However, he also took LSD recreationally.
* Kesey advocated for drug use as a path to individual freedom, which was an attitude reflected in the views of psychological researchers of the time.
* 60s – LSD was thought to offer the best access to the human mind. Each individuals experiences were said to vary; emotions and experiences ranged from transformations into other life forms, religious experiences, and extreme empathy.

**Title of the Book**

* The title of the book comes from a nursery rhyme:

Vintery, mintery, cutery, corn,

Apple seed and apple thorn,

Wire, briar, limber lock

Three geese in a flock

One flew east

One flew west

And one flew over the cuckoo’s nest

* Chief Bromden’s grandmother sang this song to him when he was little.

**Controversy**

* *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is a highly challenged and banned novel.
* It has been banned for being “pornographic” and “glorif[y[ing] criminal activity, has a tendency to corrupt juveniles, and contains descriptions of bestiality, bizarre violence, and torture, dismemberment, death, and human elimination”.
* Be aware of mature content.

**Adaptations**

* 1963: Adapted into a successful stage play by Dale Wasserman
* 1975: Milos Forman directed a screen adaptation, which one the “Big Five” Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Actor (Jack Nicholson), Best Actress (Louise Fletcher), Best Director (Forman), and Best Adapted Screenplay (Lawrence Hauben, Bo Goldman).
* Ken Kesey was initially involved in the film, but left two weeks into production. He claimed never to have seen the movie because of a dispute over the $20,000 he was initially paid for film rights.
* He loathed that the movie wasn’t narrated by Chief Bromden, and disagreed with Jack Nicholson being cast as Randle McMurphy, as he wanted Gene Hackman to play the character.
* Faye Kesey said her husband was generally supportive of the film and pleased it was made.
* A prequel called *Ratched,* about a younger version of Nurse Ratched (played by Sarah Paulson), is being commissioned by Netflix and produced by Ryan Murphy.

**Institutionalization**

* In the US, the erection of state asylums began with a law for the creation of one in New York in 1842.
* The Utica State Hospital opened in 1850.
* The creation was mainly the work of a woman named Dorothea Lynde Dix, a philanthropist.
* Many state hospitals in the the USA were built in the 1850s and 1860s on the Kirkbride Plan, which was an architectural style meant to have a curative effect.
* As time passed, the number of people in institutions rose into the hundreds of thousands, but the idea that mental illness could be treated/improved through institutionalization was disappointed.
* Asylums quickly became indistinguishable from custodial institutions and the reputation of psychiatry hit an extreme low.
* Severe restrictions were eventually placed on the circumstances under which a person may be committed or treated against their will, as such actions have been ruled by the US Supreme Court and other legislative body as a violation of civil/human rights.
* Therefore, now, people are rarely committed against their will and it is illegal for a person to be committed for an indefinite period of time.

**Deinstitutionalization**

* This is the process of replacing long-stay psychiatric hospitals with less isolated community mental health services for this diagnosed with a mental disorder or developmental disability.
* It works in two ways: the first focuses on reducing the population size of mental institutions by releasing patients, shortening stays, and reducing both admissions and readmissions rates. The second focuses on reforming mental hospitals’ institutional processes so as to reduce or eliminate reinforcement of dependency, hopelessness, learned hopelessness and other maladaptive behaviours.
* Leon Eisenberg, a psychiatrist, said deinstitutionalization has been an overall benefit for most psychiatric patients, but many were left homeless and without care.
* Initiated by three factors:
  + A socio-political movement for community mental health services, and open hospitals.
  + The advent of psychotropic drugs able to manage psychotic episodes.
  + Financial imperatives (in the US specifically, to shift costs from state to federal budgets).
* 20th Century – Increasing admissions resulted in serious overcrowding. Funding was often cut, especially during periods of economic decline and wartime.
* Asylums became notorious for poor living conditions, lack of hygiene, overcrowding, ill-treatment, and abuse of patients; many patients starved to death.
* Deinstitutionalization moved to the forefront in the 50s and 60s with the advent of chlorpromazine and other antipsychotic drugs.
* In the US, class action lawsuits and the scrutiny of institutions through disability activism and antipsychiatry helped expose poor conditions and treatment.
* Sociologists and others argued that such institutions maintained or created dependency, passivity, exclusion, and disability, which caused people to remain institutionalized.
* People argued that community services would be cheaper and that new medications made it more feasible to release people into the community.
* The US had two waves of it. The first began in 1950 and targeted people with mental illness and the second wave began roughly 15 years later and focussed on individuals who had been diagnosed with a developmental disability.

**Treatment in the 1900s**

* In the 1900s, experts began to try and understand what might make a person behave in an erratic way, and what kinds of thoughts and opinions might be attached to what outsiders would deem “madness”.
* Sigmund Freud was a huge influence there. He had developed a number of theories that might explain unusual behavior, and he devised therapies aimed at helping people who might once have been put into prison with no help at all.
* His therapies could take months or years to complete and some didn’t improve under the so called “talking cure. So practitioners began dabbling in radical cures that were hoped to eliminate mental illness altogether with one big gesture:
  + Insulin-induced comas
  + Lobotomies
  + Malarial infections
  + Electroshock therapy
* These continued well into the 1940s and 50s, and in some cases did help.
* However, they fell out of favour in the years to come.
* Doctors began to experiment with chemicals (powders and pills) that could calm imbalances inside the brain and deliver real relief to those with mental illnesses.
* Rather then strapping them to their beds or asking them to talk about it, they hoped to use a form of chemical restraint.
* Ideally people with mental illnesses would feel better, and they might behave better, and no institutionalization would be needed at all.
* Lithium helped to soothe people, including those with bipolar, and antipsychotics seemed capable of helping people with schizophrenia.
* However, the number of people hospitalized due to mental illness had reached staggering proportions.
* 1950s – Experts began moving people out of institutions, and into communities but the communities were slow to adapt.
* They were unable to provide support needed such as housing assistance, job training, psychiatric counselling, life skills training, social support.
* So many people moved out of terrible facilities and into situations that were different, not better.
* For example, *The New York Times* reported on a story of a number of young men who were removed from state institutions and forced to work in a turkey processing plan for years on less than $100 a month. They had no contact with their families, and no opportunity to learn life skills, and no way to get out.
* Others who weren’t sent to programs like that, slipped between the cracks and made a life on the streets, sleeping in cardboard boxes, begging for food and railing at the sky when the days were bad.
* A study in 1988 found that 28% of the homeless people they studied had a diagnosable mental illness.
* 1990s – experts discovered that many people with mental illness entered the criminal justice system, due to a combo of drug use and mandatory sentencing rules. Staff at those facilities struggled to keep up with the demand for services from people who were severely ill and unable to get help outside.