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Distilled Spirits -- Getting High, Then Sober, With A Famous Writer, A Forgotten Philosopher, And A Hopeless Drunk



Synopsis

Distilled Spirits blends a religion reporter's memoir with the compelling stories of three men--Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and Bill Wilson--who transformed the landscape of Western religion and spirituality in the twentieth century. Huxley, celebrated author of *Brave New World*, ignited a generation that chased utopian dreams and sought enlightenment through psychedelic drugs. Heard, an Anglo-Irish mystic, journeyed to California with Huxley in the 1930s to lay the foundations for the New Age and human potential movements. Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, joined forces with Huxley and Heard in the 1940s and 1950s, when Wilson began a series of little-known experiments to see if LSD could be used to help diehard drunks. Their life stories are gracefully brought together by veteran journalist Don Lattin. Lattin recounts his own rocky personal journey from 1960s and 1970s counter-culture, through the fast-living, cocaine-fueled 1980s and 1990s, to his long struggle to get sober. By weaving an intimate account of his own recovery with the lives of the book's three central characters, Lattin shows us the redemptive power of storytelling, the strength of fellowship, and the power of living more compassionately, one day at a time.

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellent write by an author using an unusual format. While actually featuring his own recovery from seemingly hopeless drug and alcohol abuse, he utilizes the actual lives and spiritual treks of the famous personages of Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard and the founder of AA Bill Wilson as personal influences. Heard and Huxley were long time friends who migrated together from England to the US as an adventure turned spiritual quest. There among others they ultimately encountered Bill Wilson, who was on a continuous search for spiritual satisfaction. In fact, Bill Wilson's "spiritual awakening" of the 1930's had long since waned, and he found himself receptive to the possibility that LSD might be able to help rekindle this long lost sensation. Together they used the drug under medical supervision at first, and later in small groups. I enjoyed the intellectual and spiritual journeys of Huxley, Heard and Wilson that are well researched and described by the author. In the end, I fully appreciated the author's personal quest as well.

Whenever I read something that helps explain previously unknown forces which have influenced my life, I am very grateful. By sharing so much on a personal level, Mr. Lattin makes these fascinating interwoven lives more easily accessible and personally relevant. It's a great approach, and brings to light common struggles and experiences in a way that is meaningful, supportive, and inspiring.

Something amazing happened in the US in the last century, and Don Lattin seems to be the only author who has researched it and written about it well. These three characters laid the groundwork that Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey, the New Age movement, and the Summer of Love built upon, and Lattin tells us how. I think of it all happening in the sixties, but Lattin carries the movement back to my grandparent's generation. I liked Harvard Psychedelic Club, his prior book, too, but Distilled Spirits is more personal, and goes into Lattin's own experiences and problems with drugs and alcohol. His career at the SF Chronicle is a story in itself.

The author tells a compelling history of four people... himself included. He inserts his own life experiences after telling the history of three famous 20th century men. Overall a decent read.

My interest in this book stems from personal knowledge of several alcoholics, and I was not disappointed. Lattin's narrative alternates between his own autobiography, and the history of interactions between and among Huxley, Heard and Wilson. I have to admit that I enjoyed reading about his own life more than that of the other three, but I'm very glad I read the book, and I have

passed it on to others to read with my strong recommendation.

good

A little disjointed but, overall a good account of the times. A bit of history blended with autobiographical reflection and personal insight.

Don Latitin, a former religion columnist for the Sf Chron has done a joint biography of English seeker Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley, and AA co-founder Bill Wilson. Latin discusses his own drug and alcohol abuse and recovery, so there is no attempt at the biographer's objectivity. Mr. Lattin has done considerable research and this is respectful but blunt in assessing the remarkable thinking and effort which produced a successful social movement. The three remarkable men experimented with LSD. Wilson believed it might be a form of treatment for alcoholism and alleviate depression. He was restless in his personal life and no saint. He died of COPD and puffed on cigarettes when not using an oxygen tank. Latin does a good job of capturing the spiritual developments of our recent history and provides some lucid summary. An interesting and important book

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