



The Patron Saint of Butterflies

Cecilia Galante

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Agnes and Honey have always been best friends, but they haven't always been so different. Agnes loves being a Believer. She knows the rules at the Mount Blessing religious commune are there to make her a better person. Honey hates Mount Blessing and the control Emmanuel, their leader, has over her life. The only bright spot is the butterfly garden she's helping to build, and the journal of butterflies that she keeps. When Agnes's grandmother makes an unexpected visit to the commune, she discovers a violent secret that the Believers are desperate to keep quiet. And when Agnes's little brother is seriously injured and Emmanuel refuses to send him to a hospital, Nana Pete takes the three children and escapes the commune. Their journey begins an exploration of faith, friendship, religion and family for the two girls, as Agnes clings to her familiar faith while Honey desperately wants a new future.

The Patron Saint of Butterflies Details

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From Reader Review *The Patron Saint of Butterflies* for online ebook

Aaron says

This beautifully written first novel tells the story of two best friends that have been brought through childhood living on a religious commune called Mount Blessing in Connecticut. Agnes, whose name means lamb, has hopes of becoming a saint as she follows Emmanuel, the leader of the commune, devoutly in all matters. Her best friend Honey is an orphan by virtue of the fact that her mother abandoned the commune right after Honey was born.

All the children on the commune are taken away from their parents when they are just a few months old and placed in the nursery to be raised communally. They return to their families when they turn seven. Because she has no parents because her father is unknown, Hope continues to live with everyone caring for her. It is this unique background that allows her to question the teachings of the commune leadership.

She lives with a special needs man who maintains a butterfly garden and has a secret, forbidden television, giving her access to the outside world. She also finds herself facing tough punishment in the Regulation Room because she is caught kissing a boy.

When Agnes' brother Ben is hurt when his hand is closed in a door, the two girls and Ben are whisked away from the commune by Agnes' grandmother Nana Pete, who is not a member of the community but was visiting. Emmanuel had attempted to perform a miracle by sewing Ben's fingers back on, but it was clear to the grandmother that something was amiss.

It is these actions that lead the two girls on a journey that will change not only their lives, but also affect the whole community's future. The two perspectives of Agnes and Honey challenge their friendship as they try to decide what they decisions the runaways should be making as a group. Not only are they dealing with living on the restricted, harsh commune, but they are also confronted with a secret past and being torn by their love of Agnes' parents in relation to the conditions in Mount Blessing.

Both of the girl's voices are honest, real, and gut-wrenching as the reader joins them on their journey, which is both literal and internal. Part of the realism is probably due to the fact that much of the story is based on real-life experiences of Galante, who was raised on a religious commune. The story is timely with the recent events taking place on a controlled religious commune in Texas, which has been making national headlines.

Katy says

I loved this book. I read it in about a 8 hour block - it would have been in one sitting except my husband wanted to watch a movie with me. It was a touching story of friendship and faith, and it gave (what seemed to be) a realistic view into what life might be like in a sect that is secluded from the world.

The story rotates between Honey and Agnes, and they both have very distinctive personalities. I don't really understand how Honey was able to become as rebellious as she was - she had lived in the secluded world her whole life, but there are a few clues to that. And poor Agnes. I rotated between feeling pity towards her and her brainwashed mind and wanting to strangle her for being so oblivious. Experiencing the "real" world (ie

WalMart, McDonalds, etc) through their eyes was kind of an eyeopening experience.

The book did an excellent job of not bashing religion, which is something that could have easily been done given the subject matter.

This book would make a fabulous book club book.

Corinne Edwards says

Agnes and Honey have been best friends since they slept next to each other as babies in the communal nursery. Recently, though, Agnes has started taking her quest for spiritual perfection to a level that Honey thinks is a little crazy. Life in the commune has taught them to avoid music and television, to pray constantly and to strive for absolute obedience to God's will - as defined through Emmanuel, their communal leader. What life in the commune did NOT teach them was how to think for themselves and when Honey starts seeing that there are things about Emmanuel and his "methods" that aren't the picture of holiness, Agnes wants nothing to do with it. It's not until a series of horrible things happen that Agnes has to start thinking really seriously about everything she's been taught to believe.

This book is amazing. First of all, we get to hear the story from the point of view of both Agnes and Honey - which brings a depth to the plot that I don't think you could get otherwise. Especially since, for the most part, readers will already understand Honey's point of view - we can see that Emmanuel is a nut; but to read it from the point of view of Agnes: that's some powerful stuff. To see the results of brainwashing, to see the exact same situation processed in completely different ways - that's an interesting story. And it's written so well, with a scorching plot that grabs you and makes you care.

Try this one for a deeper young adult offering about faith and how to reconcile the reality you've been taught with a desire to be true to yourself and your family.

Hannah says

I really didn't think that I would like this book, but it was amazing. The story was brilliant and got me hooked so fast, it was something that I wouldn't normally read, but I'm so grateful that I did. It was perfectly paced with the right mixture of ups and downs that the characters went through. It made me feel all the right things for each character, and anger at the right points. There was a few things that let it down though, as some of the key points weren't in much detail when they should have been. Usually I don't like split narrative stories, but this one was really affective.

Julie says

Ingram's Advance Magazine Supplement for teens recently featured an interview with author Cecilia Galante, which left me really eager to read this book--and it did not disappoint!

14 y.o.'s Agnes and Honey are best friends born and raised in a religious commune in CT. Whereas Agnes

accepts everything their leader Emmanuel tells them and strives to be a saint, Honey longs for freedom from false pretenses and harsh rules.

When Agnes' grandmother Nana Pete shows up for an unexpected visit, she learns about the abusive nature of the commune and resolves to take Agnes, her brother Benny, and Honey out of the abusive environment. Honey welcomes the opportunity, but Agnes fights the worldliness her grandmother's escape plan might bring.

Each chapter alternates viewpoints between Agnes and Honey (who finds comfort in cultivating a butterfly garden and keeping a butterfly journal, thus the title...), striking a great balance in perspectives and tension. I sympathized with both girls, and I really liked Nana Pete's determination.

It felt like this book was written with a lot of honesty (understandably so, since it was based on the author's own experience growing up in a commune). It raised hard questions about faith, family, and identity without being the least bit preachy. I really got into the story and looked forward to each chance to sit down and read another chapter.

Luciana Herman says

I heard Cecelia Galante read a selection from this book, and I was so impressed with the voice of her characters that I knew I needed to read this. This tale is as much about friendship as it is about self discovery, and Galante masterfully shows us the story from the point of view of two characters, Honey and Agnes. Although they are opposites, they are irrevocably bound by their friendship. As the story progresses, we aren't sure if their friendship will survive the strains of the extreme situation these two teenage girls are trying to survive.

What I liked the best was that the main characters are two young women who are very smart and very strong. They assert themselves, make wise choices and do whatever they have to in order to protect the ones they love. I really enjoyed watching the two of these characters grow and blossom. And by the way, the story is pretty amazing, too. It is a book that's considered a young adult novel, but I think just about any woman would enjoy this.

Kendall says

meh

Monica says

The story of two teenage girls are raised in seclusion on a religious commune until long hidden secrets begin to reveal themselves. I have to admit that I am pretty interested in the stories of people who live outside of regular society like this, and it was a pretty fast read.

The alternating voices of Agnes and Honey didn't work particularly well for me, especially since I found

Agnes so much more believable than Honey. I read here that the author had originally written this only from Agnes' perspective - which doesn't really surprise me. Honey's voice is defiant and comparatively modern, but I have a difficult time believing that someone with her background would ever speak/act the way that she does. It ends up being distracting.

I liked a lot of the writing here, and Galante does keep things pretty even handed, considering the subject matter. This is not a sensational book, although a lot of sensational things happen. Certainly an interesting addition to the YA genre.

Cassidy says

Am I picky and demanding, or is "plot" the new "quality" (that's a rhetorical question, people, capiche?) (OK, so maybe both are true)? I thought *The Patron Saint of Butterflies* by Cecilia Galante was great, but it would have been a real stunner if the literary loose screws were tightened up. More evocative descriptions, better character nuances, leaner word choice, and most of all an original voice... it pains me more than usual with this book, because, dammit, it could have been a masterpiece!

Somehow, despite these disappointing qualities, I was completely riveted and whipped through it in two days. My math teacher gave me a dirty look because I was just maybe reading under the table (didn't hear it from me). I had never thought to contemplate all the emotional connotations- almost Stockholm Syndrome-hand in hand with living on and then leaving an abusive religious commune. The dramatically opposing responses of Honey and Agnes to the same situation gave me what I'm sure is only an inkling of how people cope with such circumstances. Furthermore, I was emotionally affected by the plot of the book, and that's a big part of what had me turning the pages like lightening. There were a few points when I even teared up (I don't know what's happening to me, either... THE SECOND BOOK THAT MADE ME CRY IN LIKE TWO WEEKS).

Sentence summary: More evocative and original language would have brought this book to the next level, but the writing was decent enough to serve as a vehicle for the captivating, unique, and wrenching plot.

Sarah says

This might actually be a five-star book for me -- haven't decided yet. Let's call it 4.5 for now...

Khy says

Agnes and Honey have always been best friends, but they haven't always been so different. Agnes loves being a Believer. She knows the rules at the Mount Blessing religious commune are there to make her a better person. Honey hates Mount Blessing and the control Emmanuel, their leader, has over her life. The only bright spot is the butterfly garden she's helping to build, and the journal of butterflies that she keeps. When Agnes's grandmother makes an unexpected visit to the commune, she discovers a violent secret that the Believers are desperate to keep quiet. And when Agnes's little brother is seriously injured and Emmanuel refuses to send him to a hospital, Nana Pete takes the three children and escapes the commune. Their journey begins an exploration of faith, friendship, religion and family for the two girls, as Agnes clings to her

familiar faith while Honey desperately wants a new future.

I think I'll just get straight to the point for this review: I really liked this book. I didn't love it, but I didn't just like it. I liked it a lot.

My favorite thing about the book is that the POV alternated from Honey to Agnes. The girls are so different in their beliefs; Agnes is dedicated to trying to be a saint and has been brainwashed by Emmanuel, the cult leader, while Honey thinks the teachings at the commune are stupid and ridiculous and that Emmanuel is insane. Agnes did not want to leave the commune for fear of what would happen when she got back, but Honey wanted nothing more than to get out. It was nice to see things from both their perspectives and see how all the events affected them and what they believed in.

My only complaint: I was still wondering what happened to the other Believers at the end. The book only told me what happened to Agnes, Honey, Benny (Agnes's brother), Agnes's parents, and a couple other people. I wanted more.

8/10!

Cindy says

The story begins in a commune named Mount Blessing in Fairfield, Connecticut. It houses about 260 followers of its founder, Emmanuel. Agnes and Honey, fourteen year old girls, are members of this commune. Agnes strives hard to follow all that Emmanuel teaches and wants to be a good "Believer". Honey, however, is not too sure about the things they are learning and doing. The two girls have been friends for a long time, but they may not be as much alike as they thought. Agnes' little brother gets injured badly in an accident, and Emmanuel refuses to take him to the hospital. It is then that life changes drastically, Nana Pete decides to flee from the compound with the three children. When Agnes and Honey get away from the compound they learn a deep dark secret. The story is written in an interesting format, each of the alternating chapters is written from either Agnes' or Honey's perspective. The reader may be intrigued by experiencing the life of living in a commune from the two different perspectives.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Tasha for TeensReadToo.com

Agnes and Honey have been best friends since they were born. They both live, along with 260 others, in a religious commune called Mount Blessings. Here they abide by severe rules and try to live the most perfect life possible, except that there are some horrendous and not-so-perfect secrets that are kept.

As Honey and Agnes get older, their personalities drift apart, until they are complete opposites of each other. Agnes wants nothing more than to be a saint, while Honey wants to leave the commune and never look back. When Agnes' grandma, Nana Pete, comes for an unexpected visit, she is horrified to learn one of the most

horrendous secrets about the commune and immediately takes Agnes, Honey, and Agnes' brother, Benny, out of Mount Blessings.

Honey is overjoyed to finally be out of the grasps of the commune and is thoroughly enjoying Big Macs, driving a car, and shopping at everyone's favorite store, Wal-Mart. Agnes, on the other hand, is scared to death and feels like it's a sin just to be outside of the commune. She can't find any joy in buying ribbons for her hair or scented shampoo, and knows she must find a way back to Mount Blessings.

When a secret is finally unearthed, both girls learn that they need to dig deep inside themselves to find the courage to survive and make the right decisions.

This is a stunning, incredible, and heartfelt novel. I instantly fell in love with the book when I saw the cover, and then was completely shocked with the actual story. It was completely amazing. Agnes and Honey were deep characters that I was really able to connect with. The book also had a completely different level of emotion in it that I hadn't really experienced before. I could really tell that the author was writing from her heart and that made me enjoy the story even more.

The author addressed so many different points in this novel such as friendship, family, and the ability to ask for help. I also loved the setting of the book. I'd never really even heard about religious communes before reading this book and realized that I like being able to live my life the way I want and not have to always be bound by rules. Some points that Cecilia Galante made about religion also really spoke to me. I found it really ironic that I read two books that had so much to do with religion back-to-back (the other being *CHANGE OF HEART* by Jodi Picoult) and found that a few points showed up in both books.

What surprised me the most though is that this is the author's first novel. The writing was so eloquent and put together that I was stunned. I can't wait to see what Cecilia Galante has coming our way next; in fact her next book, *HERSHEY HERSELF*, comes out in May.

Lauren says

This is a really interesting inside look at religious communes, especially given what is going on in the world right now. Thought provoking, without being preachy, this book examines how communities like this become their own little societies, with their own governments, religions, rules, leaders, and beliefs indoctrinating those who live there so they almost become brainwashed and can't think for themselves. While clearly a work of fiction, it is obviously rooted in fact. The author was born in raised in a religious commune in upstate New York, so she does know what she writes about. A really riveting and powerful book.

elissa says

3 1/2 stars. This went on my list of 2008 favorites right after I read it, mainly because I hadn't read that many of this year's books yet. It's good, and it was hard for me to put down, but I didn't think the writing was much above ordinary. The book flap says that the story was inspired by the author's own experience, and I'd love to read an account of what actually happened to her. The plot is the sort of "stranger than fiction" kind of thing that it's easy to imagine could actually have happened. I won't put a spoiler in my review, but the secret (or chain of secrets) that's kept from the two teen girls is pretty unforgivable. And everywhere it's written, their

community is called a "religious commune". It seems more like a cult to me, but I'm not exactly sure what the difference is. The plot seems like something that teens would find sensational enough to be really interested in and I could see this being popular with teens if they can find it. There's definitely a voyeuristic feel here, but it's not at all overboard.
