



The Patron Saint of Butterflies

By 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.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 6–9—Honey and Agnes are 14-year-old best friends growing up in the Mount Blessing religious commune near Fairfield, CT, but are polar opposites in their adherence to the "Four Big Rules" that govern daily life. Honey, abandoned at the commune as a newborn, is a perpetual rebel, having most recently been sent to the Regulation Room for kissing a boy. There, the group's founder/leader, the charismatic Emmanuel, metes out punishments. Agnes is a self-described "saint wannabe." She starves herself, sleeps on stones, and wears a cord tightly belted under her robe as reminders of the suffering endured by the saints. The girls share a love for Nana Pete, Agnes's father's mother, and live for her annual summer visits. When Nana discovers the physical and emotional abuse imposed on the children, she resolves to spirit them away. Honey is a willing runaway, but Agnes is reluctant. The kids' new reality includes "firsts" such as visits to McDonald's and Wal-Mart. Their route ends in Georgia, at the home of Agnes's estranged aunt. In the realistic and emotionally charged climax, family ties are revealed and, thanks to Honey's forethought and Agnes's new understanding that the truth can set you free, the cult is soon busted, police lights flashing. If both girls occasionally seem wise beyond their years, readers will nevertheless cheer them on as they ponder the limits of faith and duty.—*Joel Shoemaker, Southeast Junior High School, Iowa City, IA*

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From [Booklist](#)

Agnes and Honey have grown up together in the Mount Blessing religious community led by charismatic Emmanuel. But where Agnes is devoted, even emulating those she reads about in *The Way of the Saints* by mortifying her body, Honey is desperate for a way out. That comes in the form of Agnes' Nana Pete, who learns about the physical discipline that goes on in the Regulation Room. When Agnes' little brother, Benny, has a serious accident, which Emmanuel tries to heal with a miracle, Nana Pete whisks the three children away. The story, both past and present, unfolds in alternating chapters told by Agnes and Honey. Galante, who grew up in a religious commune, captures Agnes' loyalty and unease, and Honey's ability to see beyond her surroundings is adequately explained (she's living with someone who has snuck a tiny TV into the compound), though the question of her origins seems contrived. Still, readers will be fascinated by a glimpse into a lifestyle not often seen. Grades 6-10. --Ilene Cooper

About the Author

Cecilia Galante grew up in a religious commune in upstate New York until the age of 15. She is currently a high school English teacher, and lives with her husband and three children in Kingston, PA.

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