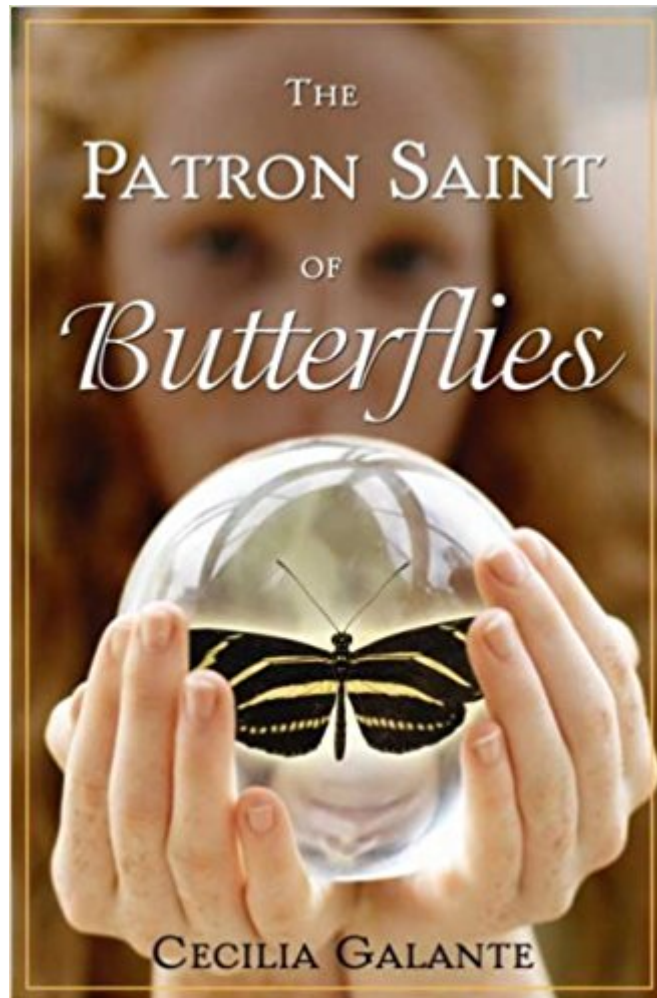




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# The Patron Saint Of Butterflies



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 6 • 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 Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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's Nana Pete, who learns about the physical discipline that goes on in the Regulation Room. When Agnes's 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's 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

I was assigned this book as a novel to study while taking classes in creative writing, diving into the use of two points of view and first person. If you want a book that handles this well, this is the right novel to study as it handles the task with ease. The story is full of depth, the characters opposite in every way but equally enjoyable to see grow and mature. This is the plot without spoilers. Agnes and Honey are two girls living in a religious commune known as Mount Blessing, a community under the oppressive teachings of Emmanuel, a religious man using his power to control his followers. It is the

abuse Emmanuel places on those who sin which turns Honey away from the religious group and pushes Agnes harder to become a saint and a perfect Believer in Emmanuel's inner circle. Honey, rebellious and independent, is caught kissing a boy and is punished for the act by Emmanuel in the Regulation Room, being beaten and labeled a harlot. Agnes, obsessive and dependent, knows of Honey's actions, but her desire to be a saint and holy pushes her to wonder if they can be friends in the face of the fact that they possess differing views of Emmanuel. During an unexpected visit, Nana Pete, Agnes's grandmother, comes and learns about the treatment of the children in the commune, and her horror to the truth pushes her to take Honey, Agnes and Benny (Agnes's brother) away from the commune in hopes of helping them. After Benny is severely hurt, Emmanuel tries to heal him, performing what the Believers assume is a miracle, but Honey and Nana Pete know that what he was done is anything but a miracle. Seizing their opportunity, they take Benny away and convince Agnes to come with them in hopes of saving Benny's life. This starts the journey taking the girls, Benny, and Nana Pete from Connecticut to the South, their time together bringing up their struggles concerning faith, family, friendship, and speaking out when silence is the easy way out. Both Agnes and Honey learn how to not only rely on each other but to also find strength in what they believe in. This book is not for everyone, especially if you don't like stories which look on the darkest side of religion. I am religious myself, but I found truth in what was revealed, the story lifting the veil.

I stumbled on this book years ago when I was studying eco-theology. I was fascinated to learn about the real life characters that the author had lived with in a commune and so I have wanted to read this for awhile now. The author made this edition very affordable, so I bought it. It was a very easy read. As I read the story, I could follow the author's pattern of Christopher Vogler's text "The Writer's Journey" ala Joseph Campbell's "Hero With a Thousand Faces." The twist was that there were two heroes, or so it seemed, but it was not til the very end that the real hero to the story was revealed. I was glad that I have my background in theology as I read this, otherwise the confused teachings of the commune described in the book could be taken as something specifically taught as dogma by some religions (which it is not) and it is only at the end of the book that a character reveals that what the cult leader teaches is not sound teaching about Christianity according to any organized religion. The characters were interesting and well developed. The author was able to insert some decent medical knowledge to help the story make sense as it progressed. I enjoyed the book, but I would rather somebody read it with someone who can explain some real church teachings in order to see

the difference between the cult and genuine faith that some people have.

The Patron Saint of Butterflies is an apt title for a novel about two 14 year old girls who have never been allowed to fly free. Agnes and Honey live at the super strict religious commune Mt. Blessing where all outside influences are banned (no TV, no papers or books besides "The Saint's Way", barely any visitors) and thinking for yourself will get you sent to the Regulation Room for a beating by religious leader Emmanuel. The novel is told in alternating chapters by Agnes, who is trying her hardest to be a saint (she fasts, ties a too-tight rope around her waist, and experiments with sleeping on rocks - all things saints apparently did) and Honey, whose one joy is a butterfly garden she tends to and whose sneak peeks at a forbidden TV have made her aware that Mt. Blessing is whacked, to say the least. After all, this is no normal faith-based commune: red and orange foods are banned (because the devil gave them their color), only adult men leave the commune to work at outside jobs (to both support the commune and Emmanuel's expensive toys like a color TV, wine, and a car - he's made exceptions for himself to his own rules) and kids are separated from their parents at 6 months until they are 7 years old to break the child/parent bond and have them fixate on Emmanuel. Agnes and Honey both have distinct voices (and their own typeface) and friendship that feels authentic, but despite the novel being nearly 300 pages and more than half of it taking place in the "real world" after Agnes' grandmother rescues them and Agnes' younger brother, their characters feel a bit underdeveloped and one-note (Agnes is too stubborn, Honey too rebellious). The novel tackles weighty issues: child abuse, brainwashing, death, and whether you should follow the commandment to honor your mother and father even if they are clearly wrong. Religion and faith are treated with respect (the drudgery of services at Mt. Blessing is nicely contrasted with a scene at a Baptist church in the south where the joy of worship is obvious) - it is those who would pervert the truth that are taken to task here. We don't get much back story on enigmatic leader Emmanuel, but it's obvious he's BAD - he wants people to worship him more than God (he plays the part of Jesus during Ascension week), he's a megalomaniacal hypocrite, and despite all of his exhortations about purity and avoiding temptation, he sends a 7 year old girl to live with a grown, single man. Despite the heavy themes, this is a quick read with excellent pacing and a real sense of urgency. I enjoyed reading it very much.

Incredible story. Incredible writing.

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