



2002

# Hole In My Life

Peggy Robertson

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Gantos, Jack. *Hole In My Life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. ISBN 0374399883. \$16.00. 199 pp.

Reviewer: Peggy Robertson

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Contemporary realistic non-fiction;

Subject: Gantos, Jack – Juvenile literature; Ex-convicts—United States—Biography—Juvenile literature;

Criminals—Juvenile literature; Authorship—Juvenile literature; Books—Reviews;

As a wayward 20-year-old in the early 1970's, Jack Gantos agreed to help sail a yacht filled with hashish from the Virgin Islands to New York City. Upon arrival in New York, Jack and his partners were captured and Jack was sentenced to serve up to 6 years in prison. This is an autobiographical account of his non-traditional teenage years, including his substance abuse and desperate need for money, that eventually led him to agree to such a foolhardy task.

As a youth Gantos kept a diary, feeling a compulsion to write. He admits, though, that he lacked the self-confidence and discipline to ever develop his skill. In prison Gantos continued his journaling by writing notes between the lines and in the margins of the prison's copy of *The Brothers Karamazov*. He recorded his own story as well as the stories of other prisoners, sparing no detail. In an effort to move beyond prison and push the events of his incarceration back in his mind, he remembered the joys of his youth and the need for children to have the freedom and spontaneity. Thus his desire to write for children was born.

This autobiography is a difficult read. The difficulty lies in the emotional journey the reader takes with the author. His desperation and aimlessness is felt on every page. Only in the last two chapters does the reader feel hope and possibility. Gantos suggests that the more interesting part of a "redemption story" is in the downfall, and he stays true to his desire to explore that as deeply as possible.

There are graphic scenes describing drug use and prison violence that are not suitable for young readers. The reader should be advised that this story, although not as graphic as could be, is indeed filled with pain, heartbreak and cynicism. Yet throughout, Gantos tells his story complete with personal triumphs, tragedies and foibles, and with the benefit of 20 years of hindsight.