

Gravity Journal

by Gail Sidonie Sobat

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Reviewed by Donna Gamache in *Prairie Fire*

Gravity Journal by Gail Sidonie Sobat is a gritty novel for middle teen readers, the story of anorexic sixteen-year-old Anise Jasmine-Luther of Edmonton, who has just been hospitalized for the third time in the "4-Psych-O" ward (or "for psychos," as the patients there call it.)

Anise views herself as fat and ugly, although she is skin and bones, and she also self-mutilates when her depression becomes overwhelming. She comes from a rich but very dysfunctional family; she never calls her parents by any name except "Loathed" for her mother and "Witless" for her father, and they seem to fit the nicknames perfectly. Her mother, interested only in her possessions and her own life, shows little concern for Anise's struggle, insisting that she stop the melodrama and take responsibility for the way she acts. "WE'RE not the ones with the problems," she tells the hospital therapist, in an off-hand manner. "Our children need to work on themselves. WE'RE just fine . . . Do what you must. Pump her with drugs. Shock her if you need." (87-88)

Her father is ineffectual, allowing his wife to make the decisions. Anise hates them both, especially her mother. She does love her older brother, Marcel, and he seems to love her, too, but he is screwed up with drugs and alcohol and the loss of his girlfriend, and is unable to offer Anise any support.

For the first while on 4-Psych-O, Anise is force-fed and watched closely for suicidal tendencies, but later she is given more freedom. She makes friends with other patients, attends school classes in the hospital where she gradually learns to trust and admire her teachers and her therapists, and celebrates her seventeenth birthday. She meets a young university student, Boyd, who is bi-polar, and the two become friends and

eventually begin to fall in love, though she is warned by one nurse that "a bi-polar boyfriend is a sure way not to get well." (70)

Anise keeps a journal--hence the title of the book--in which she sometimes brutally analyzes her problems, writes deep poetic thoughts, and describes other residents and workers on the ward. Slowly she gains more self-confidence and develops her skills in art and writing, but there are frequent relapses, especially when she meets with her parents or is given a weekend pass to her home. The only way out for her, short of suicide, seems to be to free herself completely from Loathed and Witless.

The author has managed to insert a considerable amount of factual information into the story, and anyone suffering from problems similar to Anise, or anyone who knows someone with such problems, might learn a lot. It is not a cheerful novel but through all the darkness, there is hope and a light at the end of the tunnel.

Author Gail Sidonie Sobat, a well-travelled writer living in Edmonton, has published several previous works: the Ingamold trilogy for teen readers (fantasy), plus a book of poetry and a novel, *The Book of Mary*, for adults.

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