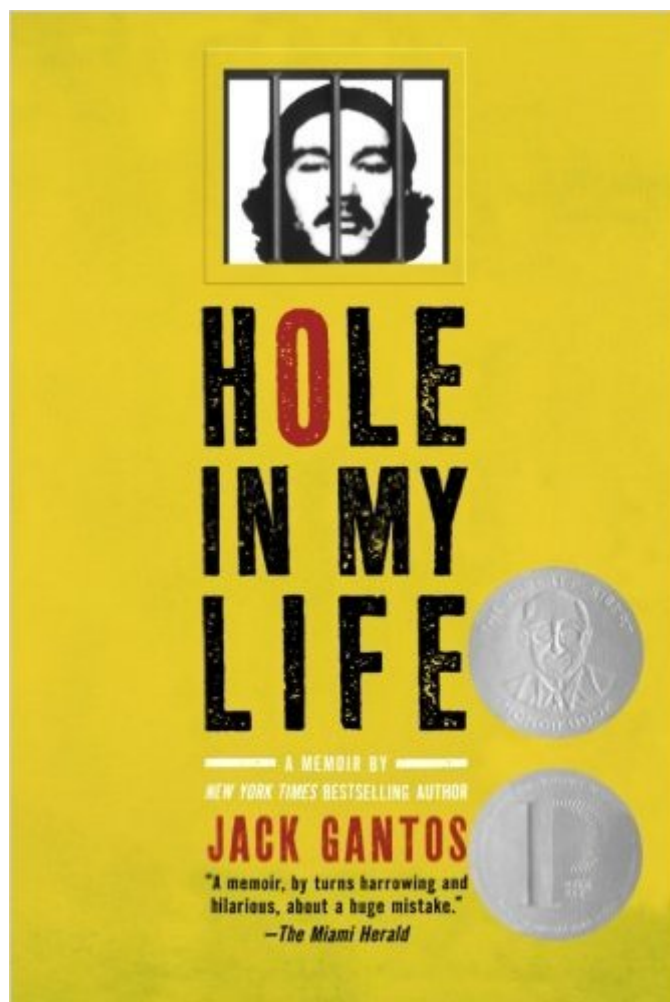


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# Hole In My Life



## Synopsis

Becoming a writer the hard way  
In the summer of 1971, Jack Gantos was an aspiring writer looking for adventure, cash for college tuition, and a way out of a dead-end job. For ten thousand dollars, he recklessly agreed to help sail a sixty-foot yacht loaded with a ton of hashish from the Virgin Islands to New York City, where he and his partners sold the drug until federal agents caught up with them. For his part in the conspiracy, Gantos was sentenced to serve up to six years in prison. In *Hole in My Life*, this prizewinning author of over thirty books for young people confronts the period of struggle and confinement that marked the end of his own youth. On the surface, the narrative tumbles from one crazed moment to the next as Gantos pieces together the story of his restless final year of high school, his short-lived career as a criminal, and his time in prison. But running just beneath the action is the story of how Gantos “once he was locked up in a small, yellow-walled cell” moved from wanting to be a writer to writing, and how dedicating himself more fully to the thing he most wanted to do helped him endure and ultimately overcome the worst experience of his life. This title has Common Core connections. *Hole in My Life* is a 2003 Bank Street - Best Children’s Book of the Year.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I first need to confess that I know Jack Gantos and have been a fan of his writing for more than 20 years. This made it particularly difficult to read a book about a painful period in his life. However, this is Jack’s best writing and is a story that many teenagers (who believe themselves to be invincible) need to read. It is also first and foremost a compelling story that will be hard for anyone to stop reading. Even knowing that all ends well (Jack is an award-winning, highly successful writer), the

suspense remains high. It is a harsh tale, and the descriptions of prison life are brutal (as they should be) but ultimately it is a story of a life redeemed. Highly recommended!

I am a children's librarian who read this book and could hardly put it down. I read my (non children's librarian) husband a couple of paragraphs, and he grabbed it the second I was done. He inhaled it and gave it to his best friend, who does not read children's books. The best friend loved it and cannot understand why it is called a young adult novel. He thinks it is great reading for everyone! A wonderful read by an intriguing, and obviously stubborn and incredibly gifted human being.

All writers have pasts, before they write the books for which they become known & respected. Before Jack Gantos wrote his children's books (which, by the way, are brilliant, energetic & absorbing reads!) he had to get some experience in living. Not many of us would have chosen the fork in the road which Jack Gantos took, faced with a desperate need for cash for college where he hoped to become "a writer." As a naive smuggler, his career didn't last long. It is, however, out of that struggle & ultimate confinement in prison, that the writer I so enjoy, grew, with his unique, taut & restless language. A super memoir of a youth well spent on ill-gotten gains. Of the chances he got to take other forks in the road on his way to redemption. He paid his dues, did his work, & then got on with his life as a writer.

This book is so wonderfully written. As others have said, it is an unflinching self-examination. Gantos freely acknowledges his own shortcomings. Better still, he does not self-aggrandize his transition from drifting slacker to convict to living the life he imagined for himself. And he does another rare thing: he communicates the real joy he has found in life without romanticizing or going over the top. Gantos also doesn't flinch from the reality of his prison life. Again without sensationalizing, Gantos includes the topics of prison homosexuality, rape, and violence. These topics occupy a very small percentage of the account, but make your reading/buying choice accordingly if you have a zero tolerance approach, can't skip a few paragraphs, etc. I haven't read any of Gantos' fiction, but this made me want to.

First off, I would like to say that I thought this book was excellent. I enjoyed reading it very much. Just to give you some background info on myself, I am 16 and do not read often. I only read when we are assigned a book in class, and I usually end up reading only part of it. Books are generally dull to me, but this one was different. When we were assigned this book in class, I figured I would

read for a little bit and then put it down, but when I started reading I couldn't stop flipping page after page of the book. That night I was immediately dragged into the story. The next day I was very ahead of the class because I was so captivated in the book. This intelligently written and witty book is a story about a boy who becomes a man through a crazy adventure. You feel immersed in his journey as he smuggles 2000 pounds of hash from St. Croix, a small island in the Virgin Islands, to New Jersey with a man who is always naked and has a gun. So he is pretty much crazy, and Jack is stuck on a boat with him in the middle of the ocean. This is just one of the many happenings in the book that puts you on the edge of your seat and makes you want to keep reading.

YA literature is full of cautionary tales, the fictional stories that say "don't do this behavior." So many of them are abominably written. Jack Gantos is no ordinary writer, and this is no ordinary tale of drugs and redemption. First of all, it's true, or as true as any autobiography can be expected to be. Jack really had the troubled childhood, dive into substance abuse, prison time, and life-changing moments. Second, he takes responsibility for when he made a bad decision (the thing that got him in prison for one, and trying to BS the parole board for another), and is grateful for his good luck (as when an offhand remark leads to his getting the primo prison job). Gantos is the author of the wonderful, beautiful Rotten Ralph books, and he has enough success at last to let us know that our popular children's author did not live a blameless life. There are so many cringe-inducing moments, like when the librarian shrugs off the lost or damaged books that Gantos wants to read, or when he loses, forever, his diary. The redemption of making himself into a writer is all the better for the poignancy that precedes it. A number of reviewers have said this is not for young people, but I disagree. Jack Gantos lived this life starting at the age of his target audience. And there are many young people making choices right now that are similar to his. Why would we deny them the right to read about things they may very well be experiencing--or may be able to avoid? Great book.

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