

Gail Gauthier

Author

Gail Gauthier's interests as a writer are all over the place. She has dabbled in social commentary, science fiction, magical realism, historical fiction, and satire. Her fiction is often set in suburban towns much like the one in which she raised her family and worked as a school and community volunteer for many years. But she has written other books, books she sees as having a much stronger sense of place, that are set in Vermont where she grew up in a farm family, the grandchild of French Canadian immigrants whose own children didn't learn to speak English until they started school.

All her books include a strong current of humor. And all of them are written for children and young adults.

Gail wrote, off and on, for more than twenty years prior to her first book's publication by G. P. Putnam's Sons in 1996. She was writing everything during that period, but only managed to publish a short newspaper essay and two short stories in *Cricket* magazine. The second short story, "How Mom Saved the Planet," was inspired by an experience with her young sons, and the two main characters were named for her boys. It became the jumping off point for her first book, *My Life Among the Aliens*.

She felt she had finally found her material and made a commitment to children's fiction. The books she has written since that time have made a number of "best of" lists, have been nominated for readers' choice awards in six states, and published in foreign editions in Italy, Germany, France, and Japan. One of them was named a Notable Book by the American Library Association and two have been Junior Library Guild Selections.

My Life Among the Aliens (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1996) is a collection of short stories about Will and Rob Denis, whose suburban home is regularly visited by alien life forms who are mistaken for children by the adults around them. Though Gail knew very little about the publishing world, she was definitely aware that if the book was unsuccessful, she'd be unlikely to publish another. So she carefully made the book a gift for her sons—if this was the only book she ever published, it would, at least, function as some kind of record of her children's lives. Every human character in the book was named for someone her boys knew. Every event—the birthday party, Christmas, playing Capture the Flag, the food the kids ate—all came from the real Will and Rob's lives.

And the family name, in the Gauthier Universe, is pronounced De Nee, the way Gail's Canadian cousins pronounce their name and not Dennis. Gail uses only French surnames for her main characters in all her books.

My Life Among the Aliens was followed by *A Year with Butch and Spike* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1998). *Butch and Spike* deals with the Couture cousins, Butch and Spike, sixth grade wild men who shake up the life of a perfect classmate. During the writing of *Butch and Spike*, Gail suffered from point-of-view problems, and, years after leaving college, she began to study writing again, which she continues to do.

Club Earth (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1999), was another collection of Will and Rob's adventures with aliens. This time around, their parents are in on what's happening. Many

of the stories, such as “It’s a Bird! It’s a Plane! It’s an Alien!” were attempts at more serious (in a funny way) science fiction. The main character in “It’s a Bird!” is totally different culturally from his human hosts, not understanding, for instance, the concept of fiction and believing that comic books are drawn by artists who travel with superheroes in order to capture their adventures.

Gail’s first three books drew heavily on her children’s lives. The “ungrateful little wretches,” as she called them, were insisting on growing up, though, and she was worried that soon she’d be running short on material. In order to reassure herself, she decided to try writing a historical novel, and she settled upon Ethan Allen, a historical figure she’d been interested in while a college student in Vermont, as the focus of the work. She also decided she wanted to use a girl protagonist to help get her away from writing about her sons. She eventually settled upon a story about a girl in Vermont who is doing an oral report on Ethan Allen that is never quite right for the teacher, who insists that she do it again and again. In *The Hero of Ticonderoga* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2001) was named an ALA Notable Book.

After *Hero*, Gail wanted to write a book for her older son who pointed out to her that many of the YA contemporary humor books he was reading were about teenage girls. So Gail wrote the “eco-comedy” *Saving the Planet & Stuff* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2003) about a sixteen-year-old slacker boy who finds himself spending part of his summer vacation with two elderly environmentalists who live in a solar home and don’t eat meat, mow their lawn, or use their car to get to work. Michael Racine was inspired by her son and other boys his age, but the environmentalists, Walt and Nora, whose culture clashes with his came out of Gail’s own interest in environmentalism, particularly during her college years at the University of Vermont.

A gift of a self-help book from a neighbor was the inspiration for *Happy Kid!* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2006). Kyle Rideau (named for Canada’s Rideau Canal) is a particularly negative seventh grader whose concerned mother gives him a copy of *Happy Kid!: A Young Person’s Guide to Satisfying Relationships and a Satisfying and Meaning-Filled Life*, a book he comes to suspect has magical properties. Gail was interested in making the book a product of the time in which it was written. Thus the references to terrorist alerts and standardized testing.

She started making school appearances after the publication of her first book. She usually spoke with students in grades three through five, but often met teachers looking for writers who could speak with their younger students. Feeling she needed to have something to talk with first and second graders about, Gail wrote *A Girl, a Boy, and a Monster Cat* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2007) and *A Girl, a Boy, and Three Robbers* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2008), also known (in the Gauthier Universe, at least) as *The Hannah and Brandon Stories*. Both books are a series of stories about Hannah Dufrane, who makes up games around stories she’s read. Hannah’s mother provides child care for Brandon Russell, who is Hannah’s less than enthusiastic playmate. The structure of *The Hannah and Brandon Stories* was inspired by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes short stories in that a run-of-the-mill character (Brandon and Dr. Watson) serves as a narrator for the adventures of a more colorful character (Hannah and Sherlock Holmes). Both books were Junior Library Guild selections.

Gail began publishing the blog, *Original Content*, in 2002, making her one of the earliest children’s literature bloggers. In addition to posting about her own work, Gail writes

about books and publishing. She has served as a judge for the Cybils (<http://dadtalk.typepad.com/cybils/>) the children's and young adult bloggers' literary award twice.

She is a graduate of The University of Vermont where she received a B.S. in secondary education with a major in English and a minor in history. (She often refers to herself as a history geek.) After a year at Champlain College where she studied secretarial science, she worked for four years for a department in what was then the Division of Extended and Continuing Education at The University of Connecticut. While there she wrote quarterly and annual reports for a federally funded program as well as advertising materials for management development and personnel management workshops. Though she hated the job and has never sought out honest work since, the experience did leave her somewhat more analytical than she might otherwise have been (though not more organized) and is probably responsible for whatever interest she has in reading nonfiction.

Though she never taught formally, Gail has a variety of informal teaching experiences. She's served as an elementary school classroom volunteer writing tutor, a volunteer coordinator for a school literary board, a volunteer facilitator for enrichment cluster programs, a workshop leader at student/teacher writing conferences, a Sunday school teacher for several different grades over eleven years, and an assistant taekwondo instructor (children's class). In addition, she has done school presentations for students from first through eighth grades in schools in three states.

Gail has also served as a speaker for the New England Roundtable of Teen and Children's Librarians, the New York State Association of Comprehensive Educators, and the League of Women Voters.

Her personal interests include reading obsessively, history, and an array of exercise hobbies, including walking/hiking (she's a member of a hiking club), letterboxing, biking, and taekwondo, in which she trains as a second dan black belt.

Website: www.gailgauthier.com

Original Content (Blog): www.gailgauthier.com/blogger.html

Email: gail@gailgauthier.com