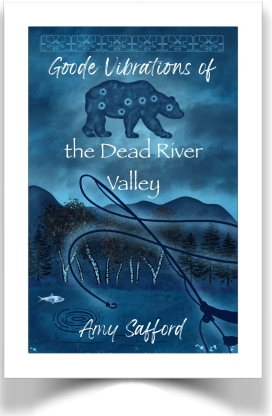
INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW
A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



Goode Vibrations of the Dead River Valley
By Amy Safford
Genre: Historical Fiction / Paranormal
Reviewed by Jenny Catlin

A haunting without melodrama, a reckoning without sentiment

In the shadow of Mount Bigelow, a gravedigger's casual inventory reveals the weight of history. ***"A little girl had a China doll, so I kept 'em together."*** Then there's a line that lands like ash: "***Sadness sat as heavy as the smoky air from the brush fires."***

Restraint defines Amy Safford's *Goode Vibrations of the Dead River Valley,* a moody, history-haunted paranormal novel that treats Maine's landscape as archive and oracle, turning Penelope "Pennie" Goode's visions into a story about what a place remembers and what a nation prefers to forget.

For Pennie, history isn't mere trivia or lore; it's a palpable pressure, a sense of crowdedness in seemingly empty spaces. The visceral experience of the past shapes her journey and her character.

Book II of Amy Safford's Goode Vibrations series drops Pennie into northwestern Maine, where the present-day problem is straightforward: a relative is threatened with losing his property. The complicated part is Pennie herself. Since a near-death experience in Book I, she has been haunted by visions and dreams that bridge past and present. She picks up the signals of spirits and stories embedded in the land, and in the Dead River Valley, the land has plenty to say.

Safford sharpens Pennie from lens into character when her cousin Bri takes her to meet Greta, a local seer. Pennie arrives half-braced for carnival theatrics—the performed clairvoyance she's always distrusted. What she gets though is something unshowy and unnerving: Greta doesn't treat Pennie's gift as a party trick. She treats it as responsibility. The encounter reframes Pennie's entire presence in the valley, not tourist, not savior, not even investigator. Pennie instead acts as a kind of medium for the land itself, a person being pulled toward what the place insists on surfacing.

Safford makes smart use of the setting's social texture. Pennie moves among loggers, hunters, and fishers, people who know the woods in a practical way and live with the pride and friction that can make a small community feel both protective and combustible. It's perfect terrain for a protagonist who can't stop hearing what other people would rather tune out.

Pennie's visions pull her backward into the days before the valley's villages were flooded by a power company, then deeper still into the Revolutionary era, where Safford uses Benedict Arnold's notorious expedition as the valley's deepest historical layer, a national myth Pennie can't keep at arm's length once the land starts pulling her under. The result is a layered haunting: personal stakes in the present, civic stakes in the more recent past, and national mythology getting mud on its boots in the deep past.

Structurally, the book moves in fragments: archival records, oral memory, local lore, visions that flare up and vanish before you can fully hold them. What Pennie sees confronts what the records preserve, and what they erase. Again and again, the same brutal mismatch: official documents protect ownership more faithfully than they protect belonging. The human costs are filed away as logistics. Safford is at her best when she shows that machinery working in real time, without speeches, without sentimentality.

The graves aren't abstract "heritage;" they're bodies in boxes, names turned into a relocation problem, tenderness surviving only in small rebellions like a doll kept with a child. Around that, the village is unmade piece by piece: church windows and pews stacked for transport, a bell with a widening crack at the base, the school marked for salvage. The prose stays calm. That calm is the indictment.

One of the novel's sharper threads is how power decides who gets to know things. Safford uses witchcraft accusations as a close-up on authority, not atmosphere: the relabeling of women's practical knowledge as threat. Herb knowledge, weather sense, childbirth, the body's seasons. The book isn't interested in offering a cozy empowerment arc or a spell that stops the logging or undoes the dam. Witchcraft functions instead as a rival way of knowing, a reminder that the valley is animate and relational even as institutions insist it is inert, ownable, and disposable.

What works best here is the series' central idea: history isn't over just because it's old. Safford frames Pennie's ability less as a paranormal gimmick and more as a moral problem. If you can sense what happened, are you obligated to witness it? And once you've witnessed it, what do you do with that knowledge in a world that benefits from amnesia? Safford draws deliberate lines from Revolutionary-era displacement to 1950s eminent domain to present-day property battles—the same logic of erasure repeating. This isn't just "spooky Maine." It's a novel that wants the reader to feel how cultural erasure and historical violence echo forward.

The tradeoff is pace. Safford occasionally prioritizes historical context over dramatic momentum, especially when the novel pauses to position Pennie (and the reader)

inside its larger argument. Book II is at its sharpest when it trusts the story's scenes to do that work without underlining the point.

Goode Vibrations of the Dead River Valley will appeal to readers who appreciate Simone St. James' supernatural mysteries or Diana Gabaldon's time-bending historical fiction, paranormal novels that take history seriously and treat landscape as more than backdrop. The book works as a series entry point if you're willing to let Pennie's abilities reveal themselves gradually, but readers who begin with Book I will find likely deeper resonance in watching her transformation continue.