

*Two comments might be sufficient here: first, there are many events and people in this book that are reflective of many people close to me. None of it is real, of course. But then . . . This book, too, was named to the Canadian Children's Book Centre Our Choice list. The sequel, **THE ENFORCER**, was published in 2007. Note that in this final draft that went to the publisher, the title was *Deflections!* I don't know to this day where that 'S' went to.*

DEFLECTIONS!

A hockey novel

by Bill Swan

Jake's team, The Bear Claws, are the last place team in a house league. Jake's three grandfathers – count 'em, three – add their sage advice to help the team out. The results embarrassed Jake and almost deafened a referee.

25,101 words in 17 Chapters

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The Bear Claws

The day my hockey team got some idea we weren't the worst team ever, Grandpa Gord drove me to the arena. Grandpa Gord is one of my three grandfathers.

We got to the rink at three-thirty, half an hour before game time. It was two weeks before Christmas.

My name is Jake Henry. My team is the Bear Claws. We play in the Oshawa Lakeridge League, which is made up of teams

from Oshawa and Clarington. Since it's House League, we're not super-stars or anything. Not like some teams you read about who travel all over the country and solve murders between tournament games. As if.

In the dressing room I put my stick in the rack. I dumped my equipment out on the floor and started to dress: pants, shin pads, socks. (I put my jock on at home because there were girls in the dressing room.)

Just as I put my shoulder pads over my head I looked over at Victoria Eldridge, who was struggling with her sweater. Victoria and I take turns at playing goal for the Bear Claws. Victoria looked over at me with this look she gets sometimes that I can't describe.

"What on earth are you doing?" she said, loudly, separating the words the way adults sometimes do. Everybody in the dressing room turned to look at me.

I looked back at her and could have asked the same question.

"Where are your goal pads?" I asked.

“No, no, no,” she said, shaking her head. “It’s your turn to play goal, Jake.”

Every game Victoria and I alternate playing goal and left defence. We share the goalie equipment, too, since it belongs to the team. Whoever is to play goal the next game is supposed to take the equipment home and bring it to the game.

“We got a problem here?” said Rajah Singh, our coach. Rajah was a good guy, about my Dad’s age, with short black hair, a dark complexion, and a moustache with bits of white in it.

“Jake forgot the goalie stuff,” said Victoria, pulling her sweater down and shaking out her hair. It was light brown and came to her shoulders. It fuzzed out all over the place.

“It’s her turn,” I replied. “Isn’t it coach? I played last game . . .” Oops. That when I remembered. I hadn’t played last game. The last game had been cancelled.

Coach Rajah looked at his watch. “We have 21 minutes,” he said. “Where’s your equipment?”

“At home,” I said, trying to remember if I was right. If it was my turn to play, the equipment *should* be at home.

“Who’s here who can get it?”

“Fred’s out there,” I said. Fred is my step-father. My mother and father had divorced when I was about three, when I was too young to remember.

“And your Grandpa Cowbells!” said Simon Lee, referring to the odd clank of bells we could hear even in the dressing room. Simon was a big kid who played defence. He had a space in his top teeth where a tooth used to grow.

Grandpa Gord – or Grandpa Cowbells – was my mother’s father. He comes to all my games and brings two cowbells that he rings every time our team scores. Sometimes when the other team scores if he gets mixed up. He often does, because he knows squat about hockey. He also is teaching me how to play the violin. Or as he says, to play the fiddle, which he says is different than the violin.

“Go get Fred and see what he can do,” said Coach Rajah.

Slowly I looked up. I had just put on my hockey pants and had rolled one hockey stocking over my right shin pad.

“Lemme” I said.

“Now,” said the coach. “Use some of your speed. We don’t have all day.” Rajah is easy-going, but when he speaks like that everybody pays attention. And I mean everybody. Including all the parents who like to think they were needed in the dressing room. Yeah. Like a bad itch.

I jammed my foot into one boot, fumbled with the other before giving up. I limped out of the dressing room on one booted foot, shoulder pads crooked and one shin pad flopping.

In the corridor I backed against the boards and looked up into the stands. There was another game on the ice finishing the third period of their game. Somebody hit the boards behind me and the glass rattled my helmet. Up in the stands, Fred was talking to some other parents and Grandpa Gord. I waved my arms until I got his attention. He came over and leaned over the railing.

My step-father is average size with an average build. He has one blue eye and one brown eye. He teaches at a teachers' college. If you ask him, he'll tell you that he teaches the teachers to teach. If you encourage him at all he will recite a poem about a tutor who taught two kids to toot a flute. I try not to ask him.

“My goalie pads,” I yelled. “They're at home.”

“Thought you said it was Victoria's turn in net.”

“It is but she and the coach don't agree. The stuff should be there.”

“You sure?” he said. “I don't remember seeing them.”

“They've gotta be,” I said. “Can you go get them? Please? Fast?”

Fred looked down at me with friendly eyes and burst into a slow motion routine. He reached in his pocket and pulled out his cell phone.

“Good job your mother decided to stay home with Nanny today to finish her quilt,” he said. “If it's there, she could run it

over.” I could barely hear him over the noise of the game on the ice behind me.

We live a four minute drive from the new arena on Pebblestone Road in Courtice. If she made it in five minutes, that would give me fifteen to strap on my pads and stuff. With help we could make it.

Fred put the cell phone to his ear. He looked like he was talking to a playing card. Grandpa Gord kept coming over, and repeating, “I’ll go, I’ll go. If Lisa doesn’t answer I’ll go and get em.”

“Where did you say you put that stuff?” Fred yelled, looking down at me. With the other game on the ice behind me, it was not easy to hear.

“In the furnace room, same as always,” I said. “On the clothes rack.” Fred had built a home-made clothes rack out of dowels and two by fours for me to hang my hockey stuff on to dry.

“Not there,” Fred said. “Think some more.”

I pounded the heel of my hand on my forehead. The digital clock at the end wall by the time clock turned over 3:41. The game on the ice had nine minutes left. The Zamboni was in position. Did I forget to hang the stuff up? I remembered gathering my regular equipment – for playing out – but didn’t have the goalie equipment.

I returned to the dressing room, limping in that one boot. The look in the coach’s eyes was something I never want to see again.

“Not at my place,” I said, shaking my head. “You sure you don’t have the stuff at home?” I asked Victoria. She made face number two, which is even worse than the other face I couldn’t describe.

“Sixteen minutes,” said Coach Rajah. “Sixteen and counting.”

Everyone in the dressing room sat back and went limp. It was as though the whole team was inflatable and somebody had let

the air out of us. Except for the coach. You could tell by his colour he was just getting pumped up.

“Well, I” I said.

A big, booming voice in the corridor drowned me out.

“Take care, take care, take care.”

A huge man bulled his way through the dressing room doorway. Dressed in a blue and white nylon jacket, he had salt and pepper hair, a white moustache that had never been trimmed and a grumpy scowl. He carried a big equipment bag on his shoulders, held in place with his left wrist which was bent back to grab the handle. In his other hand he held a goalie stick.

“Stand aside everybody,” he said as he came in the room, “I have big feet.”

“Grandpa P.J.!” cried Victoria.

Grandpa P.J. was Fred’s father. Which made him my step-grandfather. Only I call him Grandpa P.J. Everyone else on the team called him Grandpa P.J. or just P.J., which he’ll tell you

stands for Pretty Jolly, but really stands for Peter James. Grandpa P.J. still plays goal himself.

“Somebody forget some goalie equipment?”

Grandpa P.J. threw the goalie stick on the rack where it bounced off and fell to the floor. He brushed by three parents, knocking one against the wall. He spun around to apologize and pushed two others off balance with the equipment bag.

“Excuse me, excuse me, excuse me,” he said, dropping the equipment bag, ker-thunk, at my feet. “Forgot, didn’t you?”

Now, I remembered. Grandpa P.J. had taken me to our last game in Newtonville. And since I was to play goal the next game, he had put the equipment in the back of his van. But I had gone to a movie with my Dad after the game. I had forgotten the equipment.

I looked up. I mean way up. Grandpa P.J. was at least six foot two – and about the same around the middle. P.J. was on the reasons I played goal. When my mother had married Fred, P.J. took me to see the Oshawa Generals play. He bought me street

hockey goal pads, a net, a goalie stick, and would spend hours drilling shots at me in the driveway. He even took me to see him play. How could I not play goal?

“Thanks, P. J.” I said, happy, but feeling foolish.

P.J. stood there just look at me for the longest time.

“Well, it’s not my fault,” I said.

“Don’t try to deflect the blame,” P.J. said. “You’re the goalie. I’m just the dumb guy who drives the van.”

Just then Coach Rajah clapped his hands. “Okay,” he said. “Let’s get with it. We’re playing the Cougars remember. They’re at the top of the league. Last time they swamped us 9-0. It’s time we got a little revenge.”