Clarion Review

Picture Books

So, You Be Keon and I'll Be Mahovlich
Oksanna Crawley
Oksanna Crawley, illustrator
AuthorHouse
978-1-4490-0243-5
Five Stars (out of Five)

The crack of a hockey puck in the stillness of a cold Canadian night heralds the beginning of *So, You Be Keon and I'll Be Mahovlich* by Oksanna Crawley. The story is about a young boy named Niall who dreams of being a hockey player but is too scared of failing to try out for his local team. One night a mysterious stranger named Bill joins him on the small outdoor rink where Naill is practicing and encourages the boy to play with all his heart and to follow his dreams. Young Niall, who has no father to guide him, is inspired by Bill and decides to try out for the Timmins Wolves. He makes the team but the start of the season does not go well. Bill is there to encourage him, "There will always be great skaters and big shooters, but the team with the most heart will be the truly great team. Never, never quit, kid."

*So, You Be Keon and I'll Be Mahovlic*h is an unusual picture book. It is inspired by an historical figure named Bill Barilko, a hockey player who helped his team win the Stanley Cup in 1951 and then disappeared four months later in a plane crash. His body wasn't recovered for eleven years. Crawley has woven the facts of Barilko's life into the fictional story of young Niall who needs encouragement and support to follow his passion. The book is well written, with some lovely descriptions and text that is suitably challenging for young readers. The underlying theme of pursuing one's interests with enthusiasm and heart is also very appropriate (and important) for children. The pastel illustrations are not technically spectacular but they have a soft and dreamy quality that is very well suited to the story. Photographs and newspaper clippings of Barilko offer an effective contrast to the pastels, creating a nice blend of fantasy and reality.

Most young readers will find something appealing in this story. Though centered around hockey, the message is applicable to any goal. *So, You Be Keon and I'll Be Mahovlich* is sure to

hold a place of honor on the bookshelves of all who read it.

Catherine Thureson