

The Adventures of Caraway Kim . . . Right Wing, Don Truckey

CM Review of Materials

excerpt:

The parking lot was alive with idling cars, lit up with red and white lights. The cars produced a comforting, juggling throb from their engines; doors and trunks opened and slammed. Kids skittered around them; adults strode through the commotion. Windblown snow coiled off the drifts and streaked sideways. The cars' exhaust was pulled straight into the dead cold slipstream and became part of the moaning storm.

[Kim's friend] Dennis trudged sideways to Mr. Metzler's car first and stopped and whirled around. "Oh no... !" he groaned. Kim peered ahead and quickly saw the reason. Brad. In the back seat with Lloyd.

"Front!" Dennis yelled, claiming the front seat. Kim sighed. He would be entombed in the back with Bradley Rooks for the whole trip. It shouldn't take long, less than forty-five minutes, but Brad had a way of stretching seconds into hours.

Kim looked again. At least Brad was way over on the left side. If he got in the right-side door, he'd have Lloyd as insulation between them. "See if you can work the radio," he called to Dennis, who nodded in instant understanding. Some good loud music would help.

The trunk was open and they fitted in their equipment. Then Dennis got in, but Kim decided to wait until [their coach] Mr. Metzler appeared and it was certain they'd be leaving soon. He turned away from the stinging wind and willingly paid the price of frozen legs and bum.

Other cars rumbled away, some off to Caraway, some to parts of Boucherville and beyond. Mr. Metzler emerged from the hut and scurried over. Compared to the boys, who all wore parkas and tuques [sic], he was lightly dressed with just an overcoat and a hat. How had he survived that game? Kim finally jumped in the back. It was beautifully warm in there but already loud: Brad was telling a story in competition with the radio. Dennis had found a good station and turned it up. All My Lovin' by the Beatles was just ending and then Herman's Hermits came on.

"Ooo-kay," Mr. Metzler said as he took the wheel — and punched a button to change the station. Sappy singing music came on. Ramblin' Rose by Nat King Cole, which reminded Kim of the curling rink for some reason. Dennis wheeled and tossed a look at Kim that said, "I tried!"

Dennis also had to attach his seat belt. They were a recent invention. Many cars only had them in the front, and this was one of them. They were lap belts, which fit across your hips. They made it hard to move and Dennis was sort of locked in position for the ride.

But in the back, freedom reigned because seat belts weren't thought necessary there. Apparently, if there was an accident, you would bounce off the soft seat in front of you and be okay.

Eleven-year-old Kim of Caraway, Alberta, wants to win the award for either Most Valuable Player or Top Scorer on his Pee Wee hockey team. His number one rival on the team is 12-year-old Bradley Rooks. The story takes place when there were only six teams in the NHL and each team's top goal scorer wore the number 9. Bradley — not Kim — wears number 9 for Caraway. The story starts with Kim's team playing in another town. It's a freezing-cold, outdoor game, and Caraway is losing. During the game and the long drive home, Kim has a lot of time to think about why Brad Rooks is his least favourite player "on his own team or any other." This past fall and into the winter, Brad has led a bunch of boys — including a couple of Kim's closer friends — on shoplifting expeditions. Once, when Kim was in the drugstore reading a Classics Illustrated comic book, Brad and his 'gang' swarmed in.

When Brad stuck a chocolate bar in Kim's pocket before sauntering out of the store, Kim was stunned. It wasn't until after Kim had left the store and given the candy back to Brad that he realized he was now guilty of stealing, too. Ever since then, Kim has resented Bradley. As the hockey season progresses, so do Brad's thieving expeditions until he and his 'gang' are finally caught when someone 'rats' them out. Bradley decides that Kim must have been the rat, and relations between the two boys become even more strained.

On the ice, the Caraway team is holding its own. This is the first year of the "bent blade" (curved) hockey stick. Unlike Brad, Kim is a natural with the new stickhandling technique. As a result, he is able to nibble away at Brad's lead in points earned. Getting the final point to cinch Kim's spot as Top Scorer comes down to a penalty shot during the team's exciting last game. The novel ends with Kim's winning Top Scorer, Brad winning MVP, and Kim realizing that he need not let Bradley Rooks dictate his behaviour ever again.

Kim is a believable, likeable protagonist with whom most readers would identify. He has a well-balanced mixture of ambition, initiative, self-doubt and resourcefulness. For instance, when Kim decides to get a broken hockey stick so that he can fix it and bend the blade, he goes to the new town arena. There, he has to deal with two intimidating "rink rats" - older boys who make sure they get all the players' discarded sticks:

The home team and Johnny the Rat were all watching the game closely. ... Kim waited until the entire team was drawn by the magic, magnetic puck to turn and peer down to the far end, to his right. Then he boldly jumped down a step and into Johnny the Rat's line of sight.

"Isn't that...?" He wondered out loud, looking at the door across the arena where he'd entered.

"What?" Johnny demanded. "I thought I saw..."

"What?"

"Not what. Who. A kid."

"What kid?" Johnny insisted. He deserted the game and looked hard at Kim. "What kid?"

"Uh... Brad! Bradley Rooks."

"He's here?"

"Not sure. Some kid just opened that door and then ducked back out."

"About time," Johnny hissed under his breath. It was working. Kim had guessed that the rats must know Bradley Rooks and he was right. ...

There was a whistle to stop the play and Johnny used the break in the action to leap over the boards and skate bow-legged over to the penalty box, where the other rat was carefully taping his hockey stick. They exchanged a few words, and both scuttled to the door and out into the night.

Kim's nemesis, Bradley, is also believable. He is a dedicated team player as well as a social bully. The following is his reaction during a hockey game in which Kim's neck is intentionally "slashed" by a high-sticking, opposing player (the referee misses it):

"Who done it?" It was Bradley Rooks asking, from his spot on the next wall.

"Don't know," Kim wheezed. "Didn't see him."

"Come on. You musta seen him."

"Didn't," Kim shook his head. "Might have been number six, or eight. Couldn't tell." ...

"So? One of 'em did." ...

[Later in the game] Brad dropped both gloves and started swinging. He hit number six at least twice before the player recovered and was able to defend himself. Brad kept punching wildly before his arms could be tied up.

As in his first novel about Kim, [The Adventures of Caraway Kim...Southpaw](#), author Truckey uses a number of flashbacks — including the time Kim and his buddies helped an elephant raise the circus Big

Top – to tell the ‘back story’ in *The Adventures of Caraway Kim – Right Wing*. The flashback beginnings and endings are clear, but the story structure may confuse young readers. Also, as in the first novel, readers are frequently reminded that “this was before now and some things were different.” Many differences between ‘then’ and ‘now’ are explained. For instance, when Kim’s best friend, Alan, comes down with the mumps, Truckey includes one three and a half page chapter on mumps, chicken pox, tonsils, and the absence of penicillin during Kim’s mother’s childhood. While the two main story lines (hockey and Brad) are nicely integrated and lead to a satisfying conclusion, most of Truckey’s ‘then’ versus ‘now’ explanations and segues interrupt the action and will likely frustrate young readers. – Karen Rankin

This novel is for strong readers. Otherwise, reading it with an adult is suggested.

Recommended.

Karen Rankin is a Toronto, ON, teacher and writer.

Subject Headings:

Horse stories.

Determination (Personality trait)-Juvenile fiction.

Grades 4-6 / Ages 9-11.

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The Adventures of Caraway Kim... Right Wing, is the sequel to Don Truckey's first book for young readers, *The Adventures of Caraway Kim...Southpaw*. Truckey is an award-winning screen writer, two of which are hockey movies. He lives in Toronto, but grew up in a small Alberta town that resembles Caraway, where the Caraway Kim books are set.

The first half of *The Adventures of Caraway Kim... Right Wing* takes the reader through a single hockey game in the neighbouring town of Boucherville and Kim's ride home with the coach, where they end up stuck on a back road during a snowstorm. Hockey fans will likely enjoy the play by play game action here, and the numerous explanations provided by the narrator about how hockey used to be, back in the 1960s (exact dates are never given, just now and before). Other readers, however, may find the continuous reminiscences of the narrator interrupt the flow of the story he's trying to tell. As well as hockey history, there are numerous asides that indicate the narrator sees the past as much better than the lives of today's children, such as, "Classrooms were better then, because one entire side was always a solid wall of tall windows. It was easy to see outside and many kids, including Kim, often spent half the day gazing outside and daydreaming. It didn't affect their schoolwork - it seemed to make it easier because it was a relief to look out and see what was going on." (page 222)

In the second half of the book, time moves ahead more quickly, showing the development of the conflict between Kim and Bradley Rooks, the team's top scorer and first line player. Bradley, however, also has another pastime getting his gang of friends to steal from local stores, which eventually gets many of the hockey boys in trouble. Kim wants, more than anything, to earn one of the year-end

trophies for hockey, as well as help his team to league victory. Curved hockey sticks are just beginning to appear, and the one Kim bends seems to give him an advantage - while Bradley loses control of the puck with his. Can Kim ever get ahead of his nemesis in the points race? And, when the young shoplifter is caught, will Kim's one time of walking out with the chocolate bar Bradley put in his pocket come back to haunt him?

This title will be useful for libraries that cater to a young readership who can't get enough hockey stories. Since it also compares the differences between the sport of hockey in the 1960s and now, along with introducing many famous hockey players of the time, it could be used in an historical application. While one of the subplots deals with shoplifting, the resolution may seem to be somewhat lacking for this young age group of readers, since Bradley never confesses to his indiscretion and it's written off as too minor to worry about in the book's narration.

The Adventures of Caraway Kim... Right Wing has lots of action that will appeal to hockey lovers aged 9-13. — *Linda Aksomitis*

Thematic Links: Hockey - 1960s

