

Overcoming the Odds

The Final Game: The Further Adventures of the Moccasin Goalie. William Roy Brownridge. Orca, 1997. Unpag. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55143-100-9. *Maple Moon.* Connie Brummel Crook. Illus. Scott Cameron. Stoddart Kids, 1997. Unpag. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-3017-6.

The Final Game: The Further Adventures of the Moccasin Goalie by author-illustrator William Roy Brownridge is a sequel to his *Moccasin Goalie*. Both picture books are told in the first person, drawing on the semi-autobiographical voice of reminiscence. The two books together detail Danny's experiences as a hockey-impassioned boy living in a small prairie town a few decades ago. In both stories, easy-going Danny and his two friends, Petu and Anita, triumph as hockey players, overcoming significant obstacles: Danny has a crippled leg and foot, can't wear skates, and plays goal in moccasins; Petou is very small; and Anita is a girl — the first to join the team. In the original story, the three were ostracized but finally made the team. This sequel shows them, once again, facing prejudice from other players who call them wimps, but they persevere, ultimately helping the team win the season's final game. Although suffused with the exhilaration and love of hockey, the second tale does not share the freshness of the original. It suffers from contrivance of plot and stock characters, not only the three children who stoically face physical and social challenges, but also the bully Travis who torments the kids until Danny's heroic brother Bob, who just happens to be a visiting star left-winger for the Toronto Maple Leafs, gives the players a lesson in teamwork and social inclusion. The formulaic story, however, has wish-fulfilment appeal and reflects the raw experience of many ostracized children. The lively details of hockey manoeuvres and strategies are exciting, and range beyond "she shoots, she scores."

The painterly illustrations are the highlight of the book. Brownridge uses an impressionist style, dabbing pointillist brush strokes of rich colour to create the texture of wintry sky and snow. His palette suggests the tonalities of shifting light

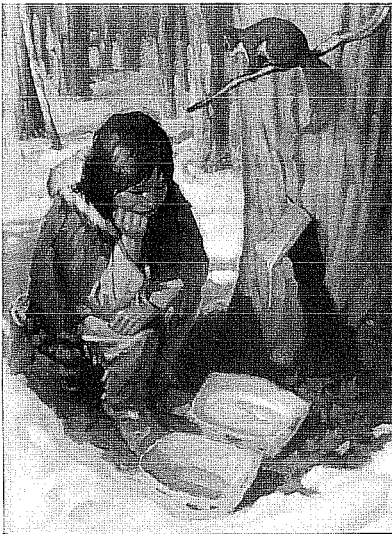


Illustration from
Maple Moon

from morning golds to evening purples and blues and the endless subtle changes of the snow. Figures and portraiture are rather stiff and consciously naive in style, but change to flowing images of energy, movement and grace in the scenes on ice with their dramatic close-ups and shifting points of view. The type is unfortunately often hard to read when placed against the pointillist background of mottled snow and sky.

The experience of living with a disability is also a major element of Connie Brummel Crook's *Maple Moon*, a First Nations historical tale, illustrated by Scott Cameron. Although the story is fiction, it is based on various native "pourquois" legends of how maple syrup was discovered. Set in the distant past, the story relates how an eight-year-old Missisauga boy lives with the sense of being different and socially isolated because of his injured and disabled leg. Unlike Danny, who is unconcerned by his handicap, the boy remains an outsider, an observer who cannot participate in child play. Stories of the underdog and outcast who saves the people are common in folklore, myth, and in children's literature, from the historical fiction of Rosemary Sutcliff to the Greek myth of Hephaestus. Here, the drama is concentrated to picture-book length, but the tension is strong as the boy saves his people from starvation, observing a squirrel drinking maple sap and bringing it to his people. He receives a new name, a celebration, and a triumphal restoration of place in the social order. The shape of the story is that of a literary fairy tale more than of historical fiction. The writing style has a quiet, understated dramatic tension, using the structure of a folktale or legend, but amplified by the psychological details of emotional realism. The child's pain and the people's hunger are also understated and effectively conveyed. Scott Cameron's rich illustrations appear to be oil paintings. The texture of pigment on canvas, the use of shading and shadow, and the still, posed tableaux give the images an old-fashioned, turn-of-the-century quality of gift-book illustrations by artists such as N.C. Wyeth and others. Cameron's use of varying perspectives, including cinematic close-ups, provides rhythm and monumentality to the images. More than in *The Final Game*, *Maple Moon* conveys the emotional reality of living with a disability, but both attempt to convey the experience within the context of a real story. The strongest book yet with this element is still Nan Gregory's *How Smudge Came* with its sense of authenticity and intimacy.

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Waking Dream Too Good to be True

The Dream Collector. Troon Harrison. Illus. Alan and Lea Daniel. Kids Can, 1999. Unpag. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-437-2.

The premise of Troon Harrison's story is promising. A young boy encounters and is asked to assist a dream collector, who by city ordinance must clear the streets of all "dreams" (actually various characters from dreams) by dawn. While the dream