

The Inwood Family: Grandravine's Ground Zero Family of Hockey

By Frank Nagle as told by Bonnie Inwood



Jason Inwood (right) with Pat Flick (centre) and Jim Graziano (left)



Jason Inwood coaching a young player.

About 1984, when our son Todd was a baby, I had read the story about this Hockey Program in North York for kids with Special Needs. One Saturday morning off we went to check it out, little knowing about the significance of a simple game of hockey. We focussed on watching the players, as we were unaware that this had ever existed before.

It had not!

We humans like to acknowledge our progress through firsts of our history. Like? Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel, Gutenberg inventing the printing press, Henry Ford churning out the Model T Ford. Similar extraordinary precedents exist in every type of human endeavour, in the Arts, in Business and indeed in Sports.

This is a story about such a historical event and a family's love for Canada's most popular game- Hockey. We, the Grandravine Tornados Family, are so very fortunate to have been part of one of these life changing moments. Now I, along with many old timers of this organization, have heard this tale many times over the years. I decided to go to one of the Ground Zero sources to get an exact translation of its occurrence - Bonnie Inwood. We are grateful to her that she captured the moment in fine style.

In her words.

Jason Inwood was born on April 9, 1973, in the East end of the City of Toronto at East General Hospital. The Inwoods soon moved to 3700 Keele Street- just north of Grandravine Arena to be closer to dad Al's workplace. Brother Ryan was born on May 29, 1975 at York Finch Hospital. Jason enrolled in Grandravine House League Hockey because of its close proximity. Al Inwood coached Jason's House League team.

In 1979, the Inwoods met Pat Flick (Director of Hockey Operations at Grandravine) and his wife- Joan. Pat noticed with interest, Ryan watching his brother with enthusiasm and wondered if perhaps Ryan might like to play. He approached them with the idea and they agreed readily. In

Bonnie's words, ones resonating with all SHI families: "It's one thing to be in a 'learn to skate' program but it is certainly something else to wear all the equipment and a jersey and play like your big brother and your dad. We were thrilled with the idea. "

In the summer of 1980, Pat went on to solicit interest from other House League coaches and arranged ice time on Saturday mornings that winter. He received an overwhelming response from the coaches, as some twenty showed up the first week with only 3 players! By the end of the first season, the number had crept up to 8 players enrolled. The coaches didn't lose interest and continued to volunteer their time on Saturdays to this special group of athletes while continuing to coach their own house league teams.

Pat Flick's family also got involved with coaching. Joan's son Steven Love came out and played goalie for several of the early years. As our teams today can surely attest, it is so meaningful and enjoyable for the players to have a goalie to shoot at instead of an empty net. Pat's son, Peter Flick also joined the program in a coaching capacity and stayed on for several years. Pat solicited sponsorship from his workplace and got the boys their first Jerseys. Pre Tornados, they were known as the Sees Wildcats in 1980. Some players came from as far away as Whitby and Oakville to be involved with this special program.

The Inwoods grew their relationship with the Flicks as they managed and coached the Grandravine (Special Needs) Baseball teams. Ryan was involved for several years as was Jason in a coaching role. Jason later graduated to the North York League and went on to play for several years at the MTHL "AA" level for the Scarborough Young Bruins, the Hillcrest Summits and the Goulding Park Rangers. Needless to say, whenever and wherever the Inwoods were at the rink with Jason, Ryan was with them.

Finally, the momentous articles in Toronto Newspapers and Reader's Digest chronicled this wonderful story and amplified its existence across North America. As time progressed, the Inwoods met up with other coaches and parents on Jason's Teams who were always interested in Ryan's comings and goings, sometimes watching the Inwoods rush from one rink to another to accommodate both hockey schedules. Because of these conversations, Bill Moxey, Vern Kay and Reg Hunt migrated to coaching duties at Grandravine. They were dedicated to Pat Flick's program and each stayed involved for numerous years.

In 1988, Jason Inwood, as well as Bill Moxey's son- Greg Moxey and Reg Hunt's son- Gord Hunt also went on the ice to help coach once the league insurance coverage would allow. Al stayed involved coaching Jason's team in winter and also summer hockey leagues as well as appearing at Ryan's program for many, many years.

Jason & his dad also played regularly organized adult shinny hockey winter and summer. Eventually they ended up on the same team playing in an Adult Industrial League for a few years. It goes without saying, that the Inwoods love the game of hockey and got involved whenever and wherever they could. Ryan usually was adopted as team mascot. As time went on, Jason took over the critical role as Ryan's coach, his chaperon, his chauffeur, his care giver and as always- his brother and best friend.

Ryan and Jason spent about 45 years with the Tornados. Jason appeared in a coaching capacity for about 37 years on and off the ice. Each of the brothers supported each other!

The enduring and monumental legacy of Ryan Inwood's chance meeting with Pat Flick at Grandravine is this. Today, Special Hockey International comprises over 50 clubs on 2 continents and since 1994 many gather once a year to participate in our own tournament. In addition, Joe and Sylvia Rizzuto, Michael & Lucy Liotta and the rest of the Board of Directors of the Grandravine Tornados, happily assumed the historic Special Needs hockey mantle passed on from Pat and Joan Flick and have ensured that the original founding philosophy is retained.

They have cemented in place, that this legacy carries on through Games, Banquets, Special events and the Tournament, throughout the year. A strictly volunteer organization of Coaches, Managers, fundraisers and other committed staff, ensures that hockey will continue throughout the lives of our sons and daughters- the players.

Here's Bonnie again: "I heard Ryan sometimes referred to as Gordie Howe, I'm hoping it was because Ryan always wore #9 and because of his longevity with the team not because he used his elbows. "

Absolutely not. Ryan, whom I myself also referred to as Gordie many times for his hockey longevity, was a kind and generous Ambassador for the Sport of Special Needs Hockey and for the better part of his life. As was Jason, who I would invariably meet up and kibitz with at every tournament across North America and beyond, in the inevitable search for procuring beers after Ryan's day of hard work on the ice!

In closing- Bonnie: "We met a lot of wonderful families, athletes and coaches along the way who we're still friends with today. It will always be a treasured memory for our family."

And a Grandravine- Special Hockey thanks to Ryan, Jason, Al & Bonnie Inwood for ensuring that we are still doing this today.

Ryan is THE one of a kind, groundbreaking hero for the sport!