

The “Illegal” School Pickup

Hunter McGlade quietly stepped up to the counter in the front office of Washington Elementary School in Camden, Delaware. He observed a woman behind the counter hunched over with her back to him. Her charcoal gray hair was tied up in a bun, and she was wearing a dark and plain sweater with an equally dark and plain ankle-length skirt. The dimly lit room was painfully silent until a loud buzzing fly entered and broke the silence. That caused her to look up and notice Hunter. “May I help you sir?”

Her tone was deadpan serious as was her stern facial expression. Hunter thought, “This is a scary looking woman.”

With memories of his dreadful Catholic school days resonating loudly, 72-year-old Hunter McGlade responded, “Ah yes ma’am. We called ahead. I’m Hunter McGlade and I’m here to pick up my grandson Dillon for early excusal. He’s a sixth grader.”

“Yes, of course. You need to complete this form sir.”

Hunter nervously rubbed the top of his fully shaven head, nodded sheepishly and grabbed a pen. He noticed the woman’s name plate on the counter – “Mrs. Gertrude Crabtree, Receptionist.”

He again reflected, “Even her name is scary.”

He then scanned the form, and methodically completed it line by line: Student’s Name, Relationship to Student, Date and Time of Pick-Up, etc. After a smooth start, he hit a bit of a snag – “Reason for Early Pick-Up.”

Although he was a relatively big man in stature – about 6’ 3” and 250 pounds – he felt timid as Mrs. Crabtree glared at him like an interrogator, which incited a flashback of a celibate nun aggressively pointing her finger in his face. He nervously smiled, and considered, “Should I

be honest and write ‘Going golfing with his grandfather’ or should I just keep it broad and ambiguous?”

Hunter chose the latter, wrote in “Appointment,” then quickly completed the few remaining items. Anticipating being challenged about his vague description on the “Reason for Ealy Pick-Up” question, he nervously slid the completed form back to Mrs. Crabtree. She picked it up, and thoroughly perused it for what felt like an eternity. She paused and looked across at Hunter over her black horn-rimmed reading glasses that rested on the tip of her nose. She then glanced down with a facial expression that nonverbally reeked of disgust. She finished scanning the form as the gold safety chain on her glasses dangled against her cheeks.

Mrs. Crabtree slid the form back, and firmly pointed at a specific question on it. Hunter jokingly thought, “Damn, I’m busted. I feel like this lady will give me detention, or send me to the Principal’s office.”

“Sir, you need to answer that question; you can’t leave it blank.”

Hunter looked down and realized he skipped a multiple-choice option – “Duration of excused early dismissal.”

He selected “Remainder of today,” then slid the form back relieved that he avoided possible punitive measures.

Ms. Crabtree reviewed his correction. “Excuse me for a moment Mr. McGlade.”

Hunter took a deep breath and stood patiently as Mrs. Crabtree reached over, grabbed the microphone sitting on a nearby table, then pushed the button. “Ms. Harrison, Dillon McGlade’s grandfather is here to pick him up for an appointment.”

The next few moments were tense as Mrs. Crabtree walked over and sat behind her desk facing Hunter who stood awkwardly at the counter. He was trying hard to avoid making eye

contact, but couldn't help but glance in her direction once or twice. Much to Hunter's relief, Dillon soon appeared, "Hey Poppa."

"Hey buddy. You ready to roll?"

Mrs. Crabtree said goodbye to Dillon who retorted, "Goodbye Mrs. Crabtree."

Hunter also said farewell and headed out with his grandson. Young Dillon McGlade was just a bit shorter than most of the children his age, but he had the heart and confidence of a lion, along with a charming and charismatic spirit. His grandparents nicknamed him "Little Big Man."

Dillon and Hunter hopped in Hunter's pickup truck and gave each other high fives. "This is awesome Poppa. I can't wait to get to the golf course."

"Yeah buddy, let's tear it up. Was your teacher okay with you leaving early?"

"Yep, no problem. When Mrs. Crabtree told her over the intercom that you were here to pick me up, I stood up and told everyone, 'I'm going golfing with my Poppa.' Man, did they all look jealous."

Hunter grimaced, "Dude, I'd be careful about that. There's no need to advertise that you're basically playing hooky with me."

"But you told me that I shouldn't lie."

"That's true, but you also don't always have to tell the whole story."

After a short pause, Hunter leaned toward Dillon and made direct eye contact, "Are you picking up what I'm laying down there little big man?"

They both laughed as they were looking forward to nine holes of golf at The Links at Shady Tree.

Golf With Poppa

When they pulled into the parking lot, Hunter needed to change his shirt. So, while both were still sitting in the truck, he slipped off his t-shirt revealing a significant scar on his right shoulder. As he quickly replaced his t-shirt with a navy-blue collared golf shirt, young Dillon asked, “Hey Poppa, I’ve seen that scar on your shoulder before, but my Mom and Dad told me a while ago not to ask you about it.”

With a slight smirk, Hunter raised his eyebrows, “So, I’m guessing you’d like to know how I got it without asking me – right?”

“Um yeah, but I don’t want to disobey my parents.”

“Yeah, I get it. Well, you never asked, but I’m going to tell you. Cool?”

“Cool.”

“Well, it’s a really long story, but to keep it simple, many years ago I got into a fight with a drunken older man. During the fight, he cut me with a knife.”

“Yikes! How old were you?”

“Eighteen, in fact I had just gotten out of foster care, and was getting ready to go to Army Basic Training.”

“I’ll bet it hurt.”

“It sure did, but I’m glad I did it. The man I fought was not a good person, and he badly hurt someone who I cared about.”

“Did you win the fight?”

“Don’t ever repeat this Dillon.....but I whooped his ass.”

With a “mile-wide” smile on his face, Dillon gave his Grandpa a thumbs up.

“Okay, young Mr. McGlade, we need to get to our tee time.”

The first hole was relatively easy and they each hit decent tee shots. They hopped in their cart and headed over to Dillon's ball.

"Hey Poppa, I love staying with you and Grandma."

"Thanks, that makes us feel good. And we love having you spend time with us, especially now that we're both retired."

"Yeah, it's always great, especially today. I get to leave school early and play golf with you, then go hang out at your pool with Grandma later."

"Life is good my man. Life is good."

"So, when do my Mom and Dad get back home from NAPA?"

"Late tonight actually. Do you miss them?"

"I do, but I feel safe with you and Grandma."

"That also makes me and Grandma happy because you're our favorite grandson."

"But, I'm your only grandson."

"That's true, but just imagine if you weren't our favorite."

They laughed again as they arrived at Dillon's ball. He made a nice second shot, and they wrapped up the hole – each with a bogey. They hopped in their cart and drove over to the second tee box. "Not too shabby on hole one buddy."

As they drove, Dillon asked, "Is it true that you and Grandma met in an orphanage?"

"It sure is Dillon. In fact, I was about your age when I met your Grandma there."

"Was it a sad place?"

"Sometimes it was, but I got lucky because my foster parents welcomed me into their lives when I was 14. They were actually older – in their late-50s – so I stayed with them until I

was 18, then enlisted in the Army. Grandma stayed in the orphanage until she was 13. Her birth mother returned for her, and was able to take her back into her home with her new husband.”

“Yeah, my dad told me about that story. It’s crazy.”

Hunter tried his best to keep his response light and upbeat. What good could come from telling his 11-year-old grandson about the relentless anxiety his grandparents experienced as children, not to mention the periodic disappointment they felt when families visited and did not choose them?

Hunter and Dillon teed off on Hole #2, and again hit decent tee shots down the right side several yards off of the fairway.

“Looks like we’re playing cart golf Dillon.”

“It sure does Poppa.”

They got settled back in their cart and headed up to their balls. Dillon’s was about 30 yards shy of a nasty sand trap. Hunter appreciated his grandson’s curiosity, but thought, “I’m going to change the subject. Dillon doesn’t need to know that I got in a fight with his grandmother’s stepfather. He also doesn’t need to know that I got arrested for assault and battery, even though the charges were dropped.”

“Okay Buddy, what’s your plan here?”

“I think I’m going to use my 3-wood.”

“Excellent choice little big man, just be careful of the water on the left side.”

Dillon unintentionally pulled his shot down the left side about 130 yards, but avoided the water. “Good shot Dillon!”

“Thanks.”

They hopped in their cart and drove up to Hunter's ball which missed the sand trap by less than a foot.

"Wow, you got lucky Poppa."

"I sure did."

Hunter hit a decent shot right down the middle of the fairway, but topped it slightly so it only traveled about 135 yards.

They again hopped in their cart and headed over to Dillon's ball. As they pulled up, Hunter glanced up at the GPS tracker mounted on their cart. He yelled over to Dillon, "It's 173 yards to the pin buddy."

As he waited for Dillon to make his shot, Hunter glanced up at the GPS tracker again and noticed the date, Friday May 23, 2025. It was a happy reminder that tomorrow was his second son Josh's 25th birthday, and it was also the day they found him. Dillon grabbed his club, squared up to his ball, and made his shot. "Oh man!"

Hunter looked up abruptly, "What happened dude?"

"I shanked it to the right. I'm not sure we're going to be able to find it."

Hunter walked out in front of the cart and scanned the area to the right. "I see your ball, it's not too bad. You should be able to get on in four strokes."

Dillon quickly removed his white Nike golf hat and joyously shouted, "Yes! I was worried about that one."

As they both jumped back into the cart, Hunter smiled at his beautiful grandson, and playfully messed up his wavy light brown hair. Dillon leaned away, straightened his hair up, then plopped his hat back on.

At that point, the refreshment cart pulled up, and the young lady driving it yelled, “Do you guys want anything?”

Dillon asked, “Can I get a blue Gatorade?”

“Of course you can.”

Hunter pulled up next to the refreshment cart, ordered Dillon’s drink, and asked him, “Do you want something to eat?”

“I’d really like to get a Snickers bar, but my Mom probably wouldn’t be happy about it.”

Putting on an inquisitive facial expression, Hunter rubbed his chin and asked the young lady, “If I buy my grandson a Snickers bar, would you tell his mother?”

“No sir.”

“Well, I wouldn’t tell her either, so let’s get this fine young golf pro a Snickers bar.”

Hunter got a bottle of water and a bag of pretzels, and the fellas moved forward with their round of golf loaded up with drinks and snacks.

As they drove over to the next tee box, Dillon shared a thought with his Poppa. “You want to know something Poppa?”

“Yeah sure. Know what?”

“Sometimes you don’t feel like you’re old.”

Taken aback a bit, but feeling somewhat complimented, he replied, “Well thank you Dillon. I guess that goes to show you that old people ain’t always old.”

“Yeah, especially you and Grandma.”

After a few moments of silence, Dillon asked, “So, we’re having a birthday party for Uncle Josh tomorrow?”

“We sure are. He’s a good guy, right?”

“Yeah, he’s a really cool guy and he can do some amazing card tricks. Plus, I love watching Mets, Knicks and Giants games with him, you, and my dad.”

“Well Dillon, in addition to your Dad, we were so lucky to have Uncle Josh come into our lives.”

As they moved forward on the golf course, Hunter shared the back story on how Josh became part of the family. Kelly and Hunter McGlade adopted Josh as an infant early in 2000. They were in their late 40s and recent empty nesters at the time. Dillon’s father Jacob (their only child) had finished college, started his career, and got married in the years prior to the turn of the century. Having grown up as orphans and foster children, Hunter and Kelly decided to “pay it forward,” and make a difference in a young orphaned child’s life. And that orphaned child was Josh.

They arrived at Hunter’s ball, and he hit a perfect shot that landed on the green.” “Boom! I’m on in three, buddy.”

“Awesome Poppa, way to go.”

Over the final holes, Hunter and Dillon had a great time with plenty of fun conversation – sports, the pool, Grandma’s great cooking, and the fun they had last weekend at Dave and Buster’s.

Pool Time With Grandma

After golf, Hunter and Dillon headed home. It was a relatively hot day for late May in Delaware – about 88 degrees – with the sun shining brightly. Dillon went back to his bedroom to use the bathroom and change into his swimsuit. Hunter went out back and joined his wife Kelly, who was wearing a floppy white summer hat, designer sunglasses and a white robe over her swim suit. She was sitting and reading a book at the patio table under a large umbrella. Kelly

McGlade was an elegant woman who maintained an exceptional level of beauty and fitness into her late 60s – she was 69 years old to be exact. As Hunter sat down next to her, he gently grabbed her hand and kissed it. “So, how’s my beautiful bride doing?”

“Pretty good Mr. McGlade.”

“How’s the book?”

“So far, so good. You know I love Nicholas Sparks’ stuff.”

“Yes, of course – the mushy romantic genre.”

“It’s a tad deeper than all of that Mr. Book Critic.”

The back door flung open and Dillon yelled, “Hi Grandma!”

“Hello Dillon, how was golf?”

“Awesome, I got two pars and I almost got a hole-in-one on the eighth hole.”

“Did you really, or are you just making that up?”

“Tell her Poppa. Remember my tee shot on the eighth hole?”

“Little big man’s not lying. His tee shot landed about 8 inches to the right of the pin, and bounced about five feet away. Then he almost got a birdie.”

“Yeah Grandma, I lipped the putt, but I was happy with a par.”

“Sounds like you two fellas had a great time.”

“Okay Grandma, watch this. I’m gonna do a cannonball.”

Hunter said goodbye to Kelly and Dillon, then headed out to play his weekly chess game with his lifelong friend – Charlie Schwartz. Kelly yelled over to Dillon, “Are you hungry Dillon?”

“No, I’m good right now Grandma.”

“Okay buddy, then I’m going to join you in the pool.”

Kelly then eased into the pool and waded in the shallow end with mellow classic rock songs playing in the background. The next couple of hours were wonderful. Dillon put on a show for his Grandma: first with his diving prowess from the diving board, then his ability to stay under water for extended periods of time, and finally they just sat on the steps in the shallow end and talked.

“Can I ask you something Grandma?”

“Of course, Dillon. What’s on your mind?”

“Poppa told me that he got that nasty scar on his shoulder because he got into a fight with a drunken older man. He also said that he was glad he did it because the man he fought was not a good person, and he badly hurt someone who he cared about.”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“Who did the drunken old man hurt?”

“Well Dillon, that would be me. The drunken old man was my stepfather.”

“How did he hurt you Grandma?”

“Well, he actually hurt me and my mother. Let’s just say that he had a mean side and he wasn’t always kind.”

Kelly had no intention of telling Dillon the whole story – how her stepfather frequently hit Kelly and her Mom, and how he periodically made unwelcome and inappropriate sexual advances toward her. Not to mention that she was only 16 years old. So, she tried to creatively shift the conversation in a more positive direction. “You know that your Poppa came back into my life like a super hero, and he made things safer for me and my Mom.”

“Oh wow, that’s cool.”

“Yeah, your Poppa’s a cool guy. Everyone thinks he’s some kind of tough guy because of his size, but he’s actually very kind.”

Dillon smiled proudly as he grabbed a frisbee lying on the edge of the pool, and tossed it to the deep end. “Hey Grandma, I’m going to swim to the other end of the pool and then back. Can you time me?”

“Sure can, give me one second.”

As she had done many times before, she reset her waterproof watch’s timer. “Okay, ready, set, go!”

Dillon joyfully swam up and back like a pro. When he touched the end of the pool, he urgently looked up at his Grandma to get the word on his performance. “How did I do?”

“What’s your record?”

“81 seconds.”

“Okay ladies and gentlemen, the final time is in from our judges, and young Mister Dillon McGlade just set a new record at his grandparents’ pool – 79 seconds!”

Dillon said “no way” as he quickly reached over and checked his Grandma’s watch.

Kelly joyfully responded, “Way!”

“Yes! That’s awesome.”

“It sure is buddy. You’re having quite a day – great golf outing with Poppa and a record setting time at the pool. You must be getting hungry.”

“Actually, yes I am Grandma.”

“Okay, I’m going to go inside and get dinner ready.”

“What are you making Grandma?”

“One of your favorites – roast beef, mashed potatoes, mac and cheese, and green beans.”

“Are you making your special brown gravy?”

“But, of course. And I got some peach ice cream for dessert.”

Hunter, Kelly and Dillon later enjoyed a really nice meal, then took a walk around their neighborhood. When they got home, Dillon went for another swim as Hunter and Kelly each enjoyed a glass of wine – Chardonay for Kelly and Chianti for Hunter. They loved watching their amazing young grandson enjoying his time in their pool. Kelly commented, “What a beautiful evening.”

“Yeah, it’s been a great day. Golf with Dillon, I beat Charlie at chess, we enjoyed a great dinner together, and now I’m having a glass of wine with the prettiest lady in town.”

Kelly smiled, “I always knew you were a great judge of beauty sir.”

“That I am, and by the way, thank you for dinner – it was delicious.”

“My pleasure.”

Kelly and Hunter then discussed their plans for tomorrow’s birthday BBQ for their adopted son Josh.

A Special Day

The weather the next day was absolutely perfect – mid-80s and sunny with a beautiful vast blue sky. Kelly and Hunter had everything set up for the birthday BBQ, including a delectable menu: ribs, chicken, brats, beans, potato salad, mac and cheese, watermelon, etc. They had some great music playing in the background, and they were expecting about 25 family members and friends.

Their guests gradually trickled in and the party got started – several were swimming in the pool and a few were playing corn hole, while several others were conversing and sipping on drinks. Over at the grill, Hunter “supervised” as his two sons – Jacob and Josh – were cooking a

glorious montage of meat that sent a heavenly fragrance across the yard. Hunter stood between his sons, and rested his hands on their respective shoulders. “This is great guys. And happy 25th birthday Josh.”

“Thanks Dad. You know how much I appreciate you and mom.”

Jacob jokingly chimed in, “Hey, what about me bro?”

Josh smiled and humorously appeased his older brother, “Oh yeah, and you too Jacob. I appreciate you too.”

As they worked the grill, Josh told his father and brother that after dinner, he was going to ask his long-time girlfriend Janey to marry him.

Hunter was overjoyed. “Oh, that’s awesome Josh. Absolutely awesome.”

Jacob ribbed his younger brother, “Man I hope she doesn’t reject you in front of all these people.”

“Kiss my ass Doctor Killjoy.”

“You know I’m messing with you bro. I think it’s great.”

Kelly strolled over to the grill area with Dillon at her side.

Hunter asked, “To what do we owe the pleasure of your presence Mrs. McGlade and young Master McGlade?”

“Well, Dillon is here to see if you need him to sample any of your masterpieces on that grill. And I’m here just to stand with the wonderful men in my life. Seeing you together enjoying yourselves makes me so happy.”

Hunter stepped over and stood in front of Kelly. He rested his hands on her shoulders, kissed her gently on her forehead, then pulled her close for a hug. “Well, you **always** make us so happy too.”

Jacob jokingly shouted, “Hey, you kids need to get a room.”

He then announced that the meat was ready. Everyone enjoyed an amazing meal followed by the age-old tradition of eating birthday cake. As Kelly exited her kitchen and walked toward the patio carrying the cake, she yelled, “Attention everyone! It’s time for some birthday cake: homemade red velvet cake – Josh’s favorite – to be specific.”

Kelly received a round of applause from the guests as she walked onto the patio, and set the cake on the table where Josh and his girlfriend sat. She lit the candles and everyone sang a robust version of Happy Birthday. Josh blew out the candles, then cut the customary first piece which he instinctively handed to his girlfriend. That sparked comments from a few guests, such as, “Way to suck up there Josh.”

As folks were finishing up their cake, Josh stood up, got everyone’s attention, and shared a few thoughts.

“First off, thanks to everyone for spending today with us. That really means a lot.”

He got a bit choked up as he continued, “And Mom and Dad, I can’t even begin to tell you how much I love you and appreciate you. It was 25 years ago today that I was not only born, but I was left outside the door of the hospital’s Emergency Room entrance. Just saying it still sounds so unbelievable. And, as fate would have it, my beautiful mother – Nurse Kelly as she was known back then – stepped outside to get some fresh air and clear her head from yet another stressful night at the ER. And when she did...”

Josh grimaced, closed his eyes, and looked down as he tried to fight off the overwhelming emotion he was feeling. Kelly’s motherly instinct kicked in, and she chimed in to help her son recover. “And when I stepped outside, I vividly remember looking down and seeing a perfect and beautiful infant wrapped in a swaddle blanket. It was, of course, Josh. And that

proved to be one of the greatest moments of our lives. After a painfully long process of red tape and frustration, we eventually adopted Josh and gained another amazing son that day, and we couldn't be happier."

Josh nodded and smiled to his mother to nonverbally thank her for the save. He then gestured his hand in his brother's direction. "To my big brother Jacob and his beautiful wife Claire, who are **way** older than me...."

Josh paused after joking about his age difference with his brother and his sister-in-law, then continued, "You've been way more than a brother and a sister-in-law. It's kind of been like having a secondary set of parents. Thanks for having my back all these years. And, also thanks to you little big man – my nephew and sports buddy - Dillon. I love all of you."

Josh then took a huge breath, looked directly at his girlfriend, and said, "Speaking of love, Janey I love you more than you can imagine."

He then got down on one knee, and pulled out the ring, "Will you marry me Janey Wilkinson?"

Janey looked down and cried with joy. "Yes of course I will Josh. Yes, I love you too."

That, of course, triggered another round of applause. Josh eased the ring on Janey's finger, stood up, and held her tight. The intense emotions were eased a bit when Jacob yelled, "We're expecting an open bar at your wedding bro!"

That was followed by a series of fun comments throughout the party. Jacob then stood up, and raised his beer, "A toast to my **much** younger brother and my **much** younger future sister-in-law. Cheers!"

The guests responded in unison, "Cheers!"

Hunter then stood up and also thanked everyone for coming. He provided some perspective on the uniqueness of the McGlade family, then concluded by congratulating Josh and Janey.

As Hunter sat back down, Dillon stood up and shouted, “Hey Poppa, can I say something?”

“Of course you can Dillon. The floor is yours little big man.”

“Mom and dad, Grandma and Poppa, Uncle Josh and now Aunt Janey, I love you guys. Congratulations Uncle Josh and Janey.”

After more applause, Dillon continued, “I learned a lot of cool stuff about our family while staying with Grandma and Poppa this week. It’s been a really great week. Yesterday I played hooky with Poppa and played golf. Then I hung out at the pool with Grandma....”

Kelly chimed in, “And he set a personal record for swimming a lap in the pool.”

Dillon pounded his chest with a closed fist and yelled, “Yeah, 69 seconds baby!”

Feeling proud of his young son, Jacob got up and stood next to him. “Look at this guy – all grown up. So, I have to ask you Dillon, tell me something you learned this week.”

“Well, I learned that Poppa is a super hero.”

Kelly interrupted, “A kind super hero.”

“Yes, a kind super hero.”

Jacob tried to wrap things up, but was interrupted by Dillon. “Hey dad, there’s one other important thing I learned.”

“Okay buddy, what’s that?”

With a big smile on his face, he said, “Well, Poppa taught me that old people ain’t always old.”

The End