

Writer/illustrator Warren Hanson to visit Shakopee

By John Mueller

Warren Hanson's visits to Shakopee always seem to put a smile on Julie Rittenberry's face. For 10 years, he's been bringing smiles and warming the hearts of members of St. John's Lutheran Church and their guests with word and song in the traditional "Cup of Christmas Tea."

Next Saturday, Dec. 10, Hanson will be back at the Shakopee church, reading from the holiday classics he wrote and those he illustrated with Tom Hegg.

A "Cup of Christmas Tea" will be in the church's fellowship hall, filled with tables where you can sit and enjoy a cup of warm coffee or tea. The songs Hanson sings and stories he tells will bring a warm smile to your face or a sentimental tear to your eye.

"He always puts a smile on my face," Rittenberry said. "It's just a great way to start the holiday season."

Along with the longtime favorites that have charmed readers of all ages for years, Hanson will share his latest work, "Raising You Alone."

The story is about children raised by a single parent. It includes explanations of the challenges single parents face, challenges that include not having enough time to be both a mom and dad, the diffi-



Warren Hanson

cult times when a parent must leave their child in the care of another person, or when they bring home a friend.

"It's all done in a very gentle and amusing way," Hanson said.

He wrote "Raising You Alone" after watching friends deal with the challenges of single parenthood — a divorced mom with kids, a young widow and a single dad raising three boys. Throughout the book, he reinforces the concepts of family, home and interdependence. Hanson makes sure the references to gender and culture are ambiguous enough that "Raising You Alone" can easily be enjoyed by adults and children alike.

"I tried to do it in a very gentle way," he said.

Hanson will also sing

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many of the selections from a new compact disk he created within the past year, "Christmas and Always."

The disc is a compilation of songs he and a friend wrote over the past several years. The songs are original, contemporary tunes that contain the same themes and images of the classics.

"People want 'Silent Night' and 'Jingle Bells.' I've tried to make these songs seem more familiar," he said.

Of course, Hanson perhaps remains best known for the classic Hegg wrote and he illustrated, "A Cup of Christmas Tea" 23 years ago. The story is about a long overdue visit to a beloved aunt and the awakening that the visit creates.

Hanson recalls Hegg reading the book to him. While illustrating the story, Hanson made two important decisions that even today give "Christmas Tea" its universal appeal. He never drew a likeness of the aging woman in the story and he never included snow in any of the drawings.

"It allows you to see your

own aunt or grandma, your own whoever. It becomes your own story," Hanson said. "By not including snow, it allows a person in, say, Phoenix, Arizona to relate to it. It's not there but you never really notice."

The stories he's written and illustrated include common themes that most everyone can relate to — home, family, being together "and some sense of nostalgia," he says.

Although they know what to expect, Cup of Tea at St. John's know that Hanson's stories will bring reflective tears to their eyes.

"These are all things we can relate to," he said.

Twenty years into a successful career that includes several popular books and albums, Hanson still prefers the church basement-type gatherings to a large auditorium packed to the gills. St. John's "Cup of Christmas Tea" is the perfect venue for Hanson.

"I really like getting to feel like I know everybody there," he said. "When I do an all-school assembly, I'm just a little figure up on the stage. I like it when we get to know each other."

Hanson, a successful commercial artist at the time, recalls the loan the two men took from Hegg's parents to finance the book. By the end of the season, once the bills

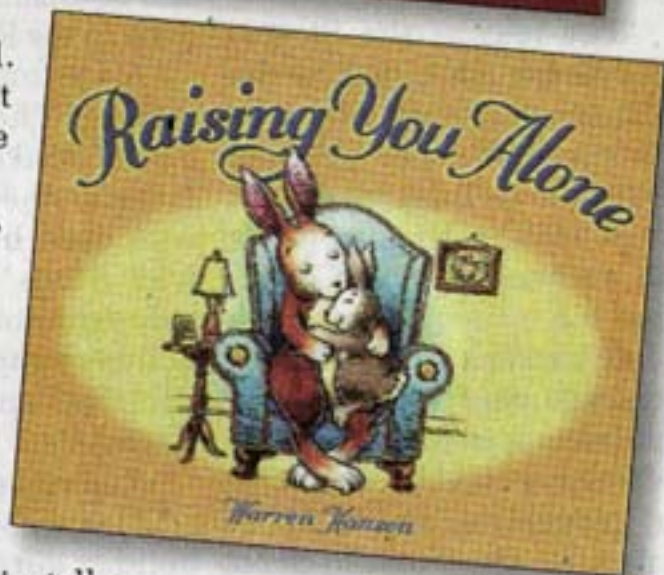
were paid, "I think we both ended up with \$500 in our pockets."

But the publishing industry noticed. Given the humble beginnings the two men enjoyed, Hanson gets a kick out of the idea that helped create a lasting story.

"It's considered a classic. That just blows me away," he said. "We really didn't know what we were doing."

Since then, Hanson has written books on his own. This spring, he plans to release "Grandpa has a Great Big Face." He's also working on the next installment in the popular "PEEF" series. He's already started work with Hegg on the next PEEF book, this one including the lovable bear and a baby sister.

John Mueller is a staff writer at the Shakopee Valley News. He can be reached at jmueller@swpub.com.



WARREN HANSON READING

Time: 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 10

Cost: Tickets are \$8. Call (952)

445-5666 or (952) 496-2161

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, 119 Eighth Ave. W., Shakopee