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'A Cup of Christmas Tea' celebrates 25th birthday

Author(s): Daniel Huss **Date:** December 9, 2006
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"But boy! I didn't want to go! Oh, what a bitter pill to see an old relation and how far she'd gone downhill."

"**A Cup of Christmas Tea**" is the little book that shouldn't be. Its verse, after all, should've been its curse.

No matter **as** the author and illustrator couldn't be gladder **as** this little green book **of** theirs has made them both millionaires. Millionaires? Maybe; maybe not.

The history **of** "**A Cup of Christmas**," goes beyond its 1982 copyright date. In fact, if it weren't for the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis it wouldn't be published at all. Huh?

Tom Hegg, the book's author, penned the story **as a** favor to his pastor who had asked him to write something for the church's 125th anniversary. What he came up with was met with such **a** powerful reaction that he had no choice, but to seek **a** publisher.

The book was first published in 1982. After 10 years in print, it made the New York Times bestseller list. It's never been out **of** print and to date it's sold 1.7 million copies.

Funny thing is neither author nor illustrator (Warren Hanson) ever gave it much **of a** chance.

"Not only didn't I think it'd be relevant 25 years later," said Hanson, "but I didn't think it'd be relevant one year later."

When asked why, he mentioned the reality **of** the publishing business.

"Most books don't do well," he said. "If I remember right, someone told me that 79 percent **of** all books published sell fewer than 100 copies each.

"Besides," he added, "**A Cup of Christmas Tea**" had all kinds **of** strikes

against it. Not only was it seasonal, but it's written in verse. Publishers say no one buys that stuff. From my experience, I'm starting to think just the opposite."

When Hegg was asked the relevancy question, he laughed.

"Did I think people would be talking about this book 25 years later?" he asked. "I didn't even think I'd be alive 25 years later."

Hegg chuckled and then remembered the discussion he had with a bookseller prior to its release.

"They wanted to sell it for \$6.95," he said. "I told them it had to be \$8.95. I said I still owed my parents."

Yeah, that was 1.7 million copies ago.

Personal connection

For those who've never read "**A Cup of Christmas Tea**," it's a simple story about a young man's reluctance to visit a great aunt during the **Christmas** season. And yes, it does have a happy ending.

Everyone who reads it makes a personal connection.

For Hegg, the great aunt is a combination of his two grandmothers with whom he once shared a south Minneapolis home.

"My dad's mom lived on the second floor," he said. "My mom's mom lived on

Warren Hanson (St. Paul) and Tom Hegg (Eden Prairie) appear together at a recent Barnes and Noble signing. The author and illustrator collaborated on "**A Cup of Christmas Tea**" 25 years ago. the third."

Hegg remembers one of his grandmother's as someone who could rip through a New York Times crossword puzzle in no time, using a pen no less. The other was more nurturing; "a lady that bought into the notion that blood is thicker than water," he said.

Needless to say, the two became the face of the great aunt. The young man is Everyman.

To this day, Hegg looks forward to signings.

"Instead of coming up with a clever way for me to sign their book," he said, "they tell me their own stories.

"You'd think that'd be tiresome or boring," he added. "Instead, I'm thrilled out of my mind." Hanson says the same.

"Personal stories, personal experiences," he said. "That's all they tell me." And Hanson knows why.

"I think we all identify with these characters," he said. "Besides, who doesn't understand doing something we don't want to do, even though we know we should?"

"She poured two **cups**. She smiled, and then handed one back to me, and then, we settled back and had **a cup of Christmas tea.**"

Contact Daniel Huss at dhuss@swpub.com.

1982 price = \$8.95 2006 price = \$14.95

New York Times Bestseller with sales **of** more than 1.7 million copies.

Author: Tom "Peef Daddy" Hegg.

Illustrator: Warren Hanson.

Hegg and Hanson are also responsible for the Peef series, which to date, has sold more than 500,000 pieces, including books and **a** Plush Bear line **of** products.

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