

The Hutchinson Leader - Extra!

Sunday, November 7, 2011

Author T.A. Degner will sign his book, "My Brave little Man: A Memoir," from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 4, at the Coffee Company in Hutchinson.

A husband, father and grandfather, Degner has a local connection - nine of his grandchildren live in the Hutchinson area.

Although the book is billed as a memoir, the last section of the book reads more like a mystery.

Born to an alcoholic father and an intellectually disabled mother, Degner could easily have become another statistic, but he didn't.

The book focuses on his first eight years as well as his search to fill in the missing pieces of his past.

Degner spent the first two years of his life living with his maternal grandparents on a small farm between the town of Cook, Minnesota and Lake Vermillion. Things changed when his mother took he and his sister to live with their father in Morgan Park, a small community southwest of Duluth.

No one would ever confuse them with the "Brady Bunch." His mother was passive in the face of his father's verbal abuse and aggressiveness. The Friday night ritual consisted of his father throwing whatever his mother made for supper against the wall and leaving the family - usually for a weekend of drinking.

It wasn't long before the living situation blew up. Degner's father ordered them out of the house demanding they leave behind everything he had bought for them. They left with the clothes on their back and little else. It was back to Grandma's house for awhile and then to his aunt and uncle's home.

None of these arrangements were working, so his mother took the only option available to her. She placed Terry, his younger sister Jean and brother Larry, in an orphanage, the Children's Home in Duluth.

Degner took the title of the book from the conversation he and his mother had before she placed the children." This is one of those times when I need you to be my brave little man," she said. "Can you do that for me?"

Degner lucked out. His mother gave up parental rights and he and his sister were adopted by a farm couple from Wendell, near the North Dakota and South Dakota border. The brother was adopted by a family from the Twin Cities.

The author went on to learn electronics while serving in the U.S. Navy and earn a degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Minnesota.

Now retired, the book is a fulfillment of a promise he made to himself to share his story. For more information about the book-signing event, call the Coffee Company at 321-946-1146.