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T.A. Degner pens book with unusual Pelican back story. An orphan from a dysfunctional family has published a memoir with a compelling connection to Pelican Rapids.

One of author Terry A. Degner's defining lifetime moments was an intense wrestling match, in 1962, with a Pelican Rapids high school athlete named Johnson. And Degner would like to meet again this wrestler after nearly 50 years.

"It was, by far, the most difficult match of my wrestling career and the most extreme sporting event I've ever been involved in," said Degner. "It's too bad the match wasn't videotaped because it would have gone down as the match of the century. I often wondered what happened to Mr. Johnson? I would love to meet him and tell him that he too was a winner that day—he certainly didn't lose."

Retired writer/producer/ director, Terry A. Degner, a 1964 graduate of Elbow Lake High School, recalls the trauma filled years before his adoption by an Elbow Lake area farm couple in his newly released memoir, "My Brave Little Man."

The author's other connections to Pelican Rapids include his first cousin, on his adopted father's side, Kathy Bergren. Her father and mother were Herb and Gertrude Degner of Pelican Rapids. During the growing up years, Degner would occasionally spend a week at his Aunt and Uncle's farm north of Pelican Rapids.

Degner's book is available at Mercantile on Main, where he is planning a book signing appearance.

His most vivid memory pertaining to Pelican Rapids was the wrestling match in 1962 (Heart-O-Lakes Conference) with a young man from Pelican by the last name of Johnson.

Although the memoir is about the first eight years of Degner's life, he refers to this particular wrestling match in the memoir because it exemplified his penchant for pushing himself to extremes.

"Toward the end of the wrestling match," he writes, "the coach revived me with smelling salts between the second and third overtime, and I went on to win the championship."

The final score was something like twenty-four to twenty-four and that he won by a referee's decision, noted Degner. Those involved in wrestling would recognize the remarkable nature of the match.

"My wrestling coach told me that it was the greatest match he had ever seen," said Degner. "A score of twenty-four to twenty-four is almost unheard of. I've always wanted to talk to the Pelican wrestler."

His time in the orphanage, and the high school wrestling match, established his propensity to push himself to extremes.

"But unfortunately there was a destructive side to my competitive nature. I don't know if I was born this way or if it started in the orphanage, but over the years I've gotten angry at myself during sporting events and I've driven myself to extremes, sometimes to the point of complete exhaustion," said Degner, though he went on to win the championship, Degner said he "paid a price. I went blind for an hour after the event and I ended up in bed for a week, unable to move. A doctor later told me that I had most likely damaged my auto-immune system."

Degner describes his memoir, as "a true story that had to be told" about a "survivor of the kind of childhood that is usually the undoing of less hardy souls."

In 1950, a doctor in Duluth, Minnesota, wrote in his medical file that a four-year old boy had been admitted to the hospital as a "rather severe behavior problem." "This is," the doctor noted, "a broken home and the mother-child relationship is not good."

That boy is the author Degner. He had been shuffled from one nesting arrangement to another for all of his short life. First, he had lived with his grandparents on their rustic farmstead in the heart of Minnesota's north woods, then with his intellectually disabled mother and a mostly absent alcoholic father, and finally with a boorish relative. In spite of a dysfunctional family life, he had been relatively happy. The real problems started when the author's mother dropped him and his two younger siblings off at an orphanage. A week later, they ran away to find their mother, and he ended up at the hospital in a straight jacket.

Thus began the author's journey of triumph over multiple misfortunes. Eight years later, while lying on the banks of a river on his adoptive parents' farm south of Wendell, Minnesota and inspired by the many Dickens novels he had read, the author promised God he would share his story with the world. "My Brave Little Man" is the fulfillment of that promise.

Degner, who is semi-retired, now lives in Eden Prairie. He is a husband, father, and grandfather of fifteen children. For over twenty-three years, he designed, wrote, directed, and edited hundreds of video, sound, and multimedia productions; including children's shows, documentaries, dramas, and training and promotional programs. For twelve of those years, he owned and managed his own production company.

In the early years, he worked in theater and he studied and taught television drama with an emphasis on script development. One of his students was a young man by the name of John Ritter of Three's Company fame. In addition to his media career, the author spent twelve years in sales and marketing, climbing the corporate ladder and winning many awards. He has an education in electronics from the U.S. Navy, a degree from the University of Minnesota in broadcasting journalism, and he is a certified webmaster.