

FAMILY



Take time to create
and time to dream,
a children's author says



Write me a story

By Deb Holland

Journal Staff Writer

Warren Hanson constantly amazes children with the fact that he can make a living by making things up.

The Yankton native, who now lives in St. Paul, Minn., has been an author and illustrator for the past 20 years.

He realized he had a gift for drawing and developing story lines to accompany his work as early as age 6.

"I've been drawing pictures since I was really little," he said during a break in his schedule as a recent visiting artist at Valley View Elementary School in Rapid City.

When he was growing up in Yankton, there were no authors to serve as mentors or to explain the craft.

After graduating from Yankton High School in 1967, Hanson earned a degree at Augustana College in Sioux Falls and later attended the College of Visual Arts in St. Paul from 1971 to 1973. He worked for years as a commercial illustrator.

Then, in his mid-30s, he decided to follow his passion.

"I believed there was something more I could be doing with my talent," Hanson said.

When visiting schools, Hanson draws characters for the children and then asks them to come up with ideas upon which he can build a story. During the Valley View visit, students suggested a parrot and a rocket.

With characters chosen, Hanson tells the students they are going to watch a grown man think. After the moment of silence, Hanson imparts his version of a parrot and rocket story.

"They see the payoff of taking time to think," Hanson said.

At a gathering at another school, a student offered the idea of having a caveman as a neighbor. Hanson said he believed that idea could make a good book. "The problem is, I now have responsibility to that idea. I have to give it time to gestate, then maybe start writing to see if it starts to form a story," he said.

He emphasizes to students the importance of daydreaming in creating stories. He says that can be difficult for kids who are pulled in different directions for everything from music lessons to soccer practice.

"You need quiet time for ideas to take root," he said. "Ideas need fertile soil. You need to stop and listen to what's in your head, and today, our society doesn't tolerate that."

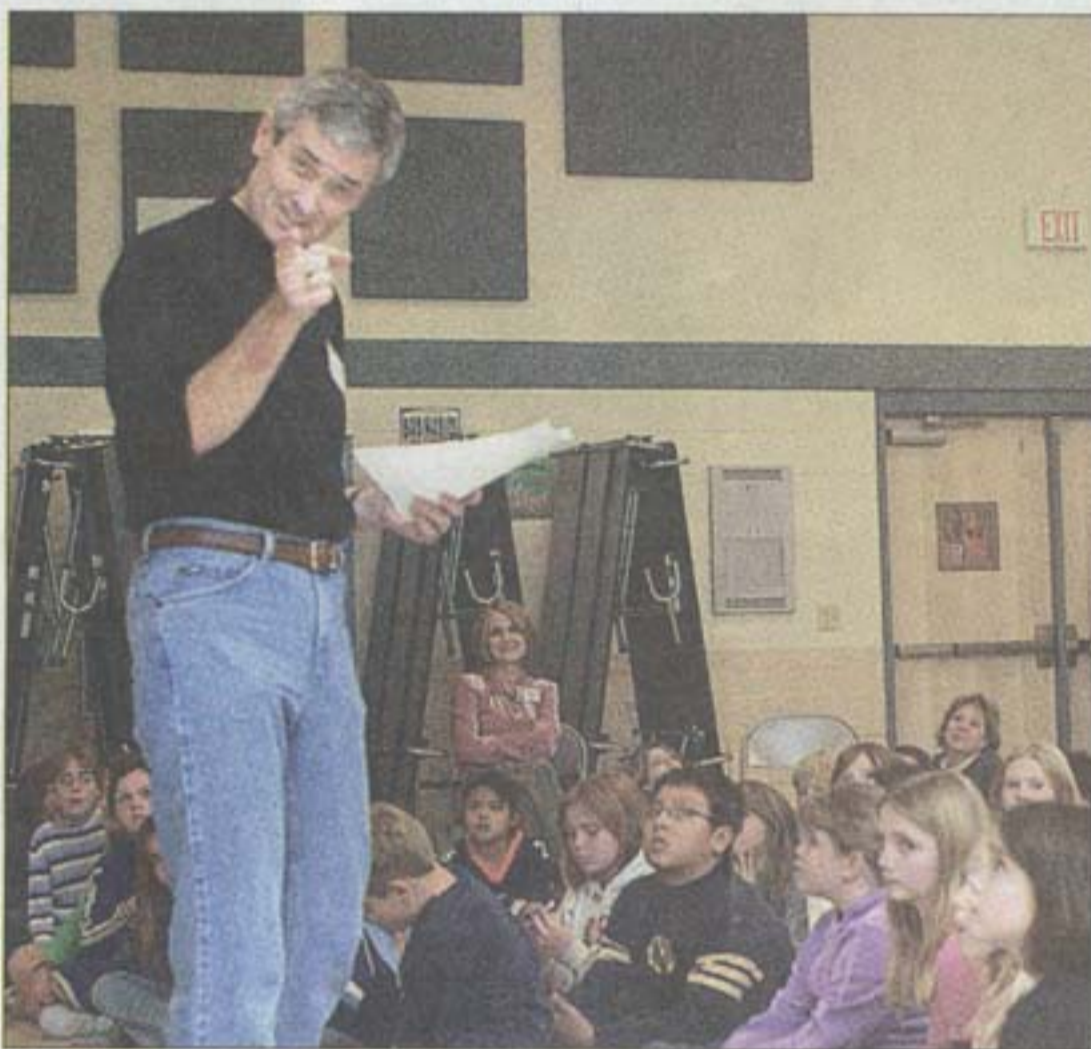
Hanson also explains to students during his presentations that authors, like other professionals, use tools to create their product. In a writer's case, that tool box includes words.

"Choosing the right word and using it in the right way is part of the process," Hanson said.

Writing is a privilege, he said.

"I've developed a love of language and creating magic with it," Hanson said.

Hanson initially writes with pen on paper for a couple months, then puts the words on computer so that he can easily



Photos by Dick Kettlewell/Journal staff

Warren Hanson reads to students during a presentation at Valley View Elementary School in Rapid City. Hanson, a Yankton native, has written or illustrated several children's books. Among Warren Hanson's works are "Raising You Alone," "Up to the Lake," and "Reading with Dad," all pictured at the top of the page, and "Peef The Christmas Bear," shown below.

change the order of the ideas.

"Finally, I start to see through the fog of all my notes. I can see this story in there," Hanson said. "Then, it becomes a refining process on the computer."

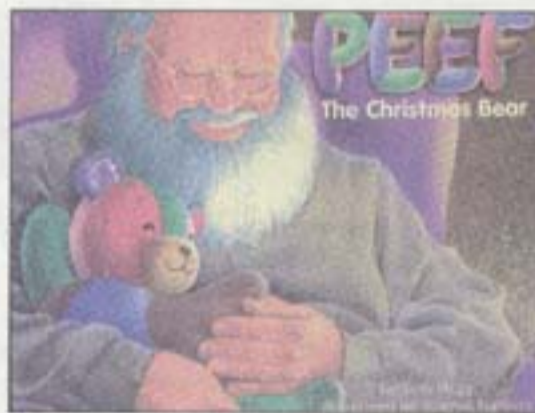
After the story has been refined, the illustration process begins. That can take up to a year or more.

Hanson has written and illustrated several books of his own, and teamed with others as an illustrator on many books. Among those are "A Cup of Christmas Tea," which sold more than 1.5 million copies and also "Peef The Christmas Bear."

"Peef" tells the story of a little bear who is created when each of Santa's elves are asked to pick out their favorite pieces of fabric. Peef stays with Santa for many years, but can't help feeling that he needs to belong and bring happiness to a young child. Then, one Christmas, Santa is one toy short, so he is left behind with a child who is thrilled beyond belief.

Hanson helped author Tom Hegg develop the story.

"We went back and forth on the story and only realized after the story was done how many layers it has," Hanson said. "Peef represents us all. It's the story of being a parent, giving our children safe haven and then ultimately allowing them to go out on their own. It's also the Christmas story."



Hanson is proud to have created such a timeless, meaningful book for children. But children's books aren't the gems they once were, he said.

"I believe the quality has gone down in favor of splashiness," he said.

His advice to parents on choosing a good book?

"Don't judge a book by its cover. Today, they're like cereal boxes," he said. "Ask a librarian about their favorite books. Ask questions."

And regrettably, book publishers have bought into the assumption that parents don't have as much time to spend reading to their kids, therefore, books should be shorter.

"Spend the time," Hanson said. "You have to understand how precious that time is."

Children's Book Week

Now through Nov. 20 is the 86th annual celebration of Children's Book Week.

This year's theme is "Imagine."

The Children's Book Council, the national sponsor of Children's Book Week, encourages parents and caregivers to spend time with their kids this week exploring the world of children's books in a bookstore or library.

Children's Book Week was created to bring parents, teachers, librarians, booksellers and publishers together to talk about books and reading.

Everyone who has ever cried with Wilbur the Pig over the loss of Charlotte, laughed with Charlie and Willie Wonka, run with Tom and Huck, or just spent an afternoon with Harry Potter, knows how a book can change lives in ways great and small.

In celebration of Children's Book Week, the Rapid City Public Library will host several events. They include:

■ **Create a Comic:** Create your own comic book panel. Workshop begins at 4 p.m. today and 4 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 17.

■ **Make a Book:** Create your own story and make a book. Workshop runs from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 19.

■ **Imagination Challenge:** Throughout the week, children can take the Children's Book Week challenge to win great prizes.

The Children's Book Council Web site, www.cbcbooks.org, has a list of activities that can be used to celebrate Children's Book Week.

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