



# MY HUGGY BEAR

## Gene Legler

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Gene Legler's *My Huggy Bear* Embraces Importance of Love from Family and Friends

*Author Delivers Message to Children that Happiness is Inclusive*

DALLAS — For North Texas author Gene Legler, family time is really “life” time. In his new book, *My Huggy Bear* (Brown Books Publishing Group), Legler reaches back to his own childhood with memories of support, love, interaction and encouragement from his parents that left a lasting impression on him as he grew to adulthood with his own family and now as a grandfather.

“When you are a child, there’s nothing better than the reassurance of having someone there for you at all times,” Legler says. “My father worked two jobs to support all six of us, and my mother was always there for us. I think one of the most important parts of a child’s development is their interaction with their parents, which helps set the tone for their interactions with their own children one day.”

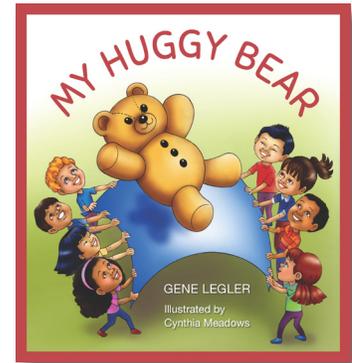
Legler’s inspiration to write *My Huggy Bear* came from his indoctrination of playing and interacting with his many siblings and relatives at a very young age. In the book, he wanted to capture the innocence and acceptance that children so readily and easily embrace. He accomplished that beautifully through vivid illustrations.

“Adults create barriers. Children do not,” stresses Legler. “I think it is important to show children from different ethnicities sharing similar experiences. Happiness is inclusive, not exclusive.”

Legler remembers growing up and seeing other kids who he felt needed a friend or someone to support them.

“I remember when I was around 13 years old, a neighborhood family sponsored a ‘fresh air kid’ for two weeks. This was a program developed in the 1970’s for kids from New York City to spend a few weeks in a small town away from their homes in the city. Charlie was a young black child about a year younger than me. He didn’t care for the young boy in his sponsor’s family, but he liked me. Our neighborhood was all white. My grammar school was all white. But most of my boyhood idols were black. The only difference I saw between the two of us was a year in our ages. We just talked like two kids with no socially created barriers.”

Legler has started a nonprofit called Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America. The foundation provides financial assistance to minority students living below the poverty line to pay for their college education. All proceeds from *My Huggy Bear* go directly to supporting Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America.



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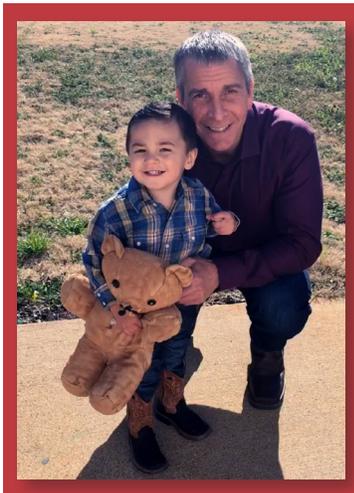


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## Gene Legler

## About the Author

### Gene Legler



Gene Legler was born and raised in Rochester, N.Y., but now lives in Justin, Texas. He attended Holy Cross School and Charlotte High School. All of his childhood heroes lived in the sports world: Muhammad Ali, Lew Alcindor, Rod Carew, Bobby Orr, and the Oklahoma Sooners. He and his friends spent their days playing baseball at 42 School, hockey on backyard rinks, and football on their street (on which Gene painted a 50-yard field). In the winter, they swept driveways to clear their basketball courts. As Gene grew older, he realized that his biggest influences — and his real heroes — had been there all along: his parents. His father, Edward, was a firefighter and worked a second job in a tool and die shop to support a family of six. His mother, Noreen, a homemaker, was always there with her

helping hands and her caring heart.

When Gene was 5 years old, he had a stuffed tiger that he took everywhere. His mother asked him if he would donate it to Goodwill. She convinced Gene that as much as he loved that tiger, there was someone who needed it more. He agreed, and it was then that she bought him a teddy bear that he named Sandy. This was the genesis of *My Huggy Bear*. Sandy is a little tattered and has gotten a lot of love over the years from both Gene's children and his grandson. In 2015, Gene founded a nonprofit called Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America. The foundation provides financial assistance for minority students living below the poverty line to pay for their college education. All proceeds from *My Huggy Bear* go directly to supporting Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America.



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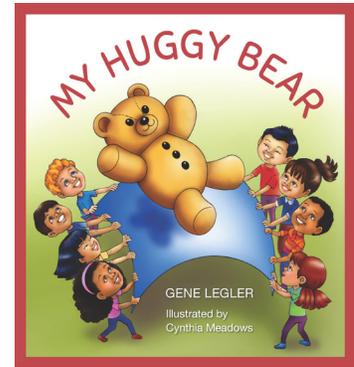
## Gene Legler

## Q&A With Gene Legler

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### **Why was it important for you to write a book for children?**

I have always loved interacting with children. I am the youngest of six, and when I was 10 years old, I was already an uncle (two nieces and a nephew). It was a lot of fun playing with them and teaching them how to play sports once they had learned to walk.



### **What impact and significance has Sandy, the teddy bear you had at a very young age, had on your own family and even your grandsons?**

I enjoyed watching my two kids play with Sandy when they were young. Sandy's nose was held on by a stitch, and I got a little anxious when they would try to pick him up by his nose. How could a bear smell if his nose fell off? I got over that and had it stitched tighter in time for my grandson to enjoy.

### **How does *My Huggy Bear* reinforce the importance of companionship with family and friends?**

I think everyone wants to share their experiences with their family and best friends.

### **As symbolic as it is of love, how impactful and meaningful is it for a child to physically have a teddy bear or “someone” to hug?**

Extremely important. When you are a child, there's nothing better than the reassurance of having someone there for you at all times. My father worked two jobs to support all six of us, and my mother was always there for us. Sandy was there for me when I took naps and when I went to sleep for the night – keeping company with this little boy who was afraid of the dark.

### **In the book, Huggy Bear is on the go with different children and their families to all sorts of places and activities where they are making lifelong memories. How important is it for each of us to invest in a child's life during the formative years to help create those lasting memories?**

I think one of the most important parts of a child's development is their interaction with their parents, which helps set the tone for their interactions with their own children one day.





**How do the beautiful illustrations in the book promote acceptance of people from all backgrounds among children and adults?**

Adults create barriers. Children do not. I think it's important to show children from different ethnicities sharing similar experiences. Happiness is inclusive, not exclusive.

**As you were growing up, did you see other kids who you felt needed a friend or someone to support them, and how did that start a fire in your soul to bring awareness to their need?**

I remember when I was around 13 years old, a neighborhood family sponsored a "fresh air kid" for two weeks. This was a program developed in the 1970's for kids from New York City to spend a few weeks in a small town away from their homes in the city and to have the chance to see that life doesn't always run at such a fast pace. Charlie was a young black child about a year younger than me. He didn't care for the young boy in his sponsor's family, but he liked me. Our neighborhood was all white. My grammar school was all white. But most of my boyhood idols were black. The only difference I saw between the two of us was a year in our ages. Charlie was in the "fresh air kid" program for two years, and we spent a lot of time together riding bikes and hanging out. When I first met him, he was pretty quiet and sad – probably a little homesick, too. But in no time he was smiling! We just talked like two kids with no socially created barriers.

**How can parents and adults best fulfill the role of Huggy Bear and meet those needs of children?**

Be their friend. Be affectionate. Share your experiences with children.

**What prompted you to create *Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America*? (*Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America is a nonprofit that provides assistance to college-bound minority high school seniors coming from low-income backgrounds. All proceeds of My Huggy Bear benefit Helping Hands.*)**

My parents were always giving money to numerous charities – from Catholic missions to local youth groups. They showed me their compassion for helping others, and HHACHOA is my way of sharing and giving back to the community in order to provide opportunity and impact lives.





# MY HUGGY BEAR

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### *My Huggy Bear* Endorsement

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Gene has been a family friend for years, going back to when he and my father worked together at Xerox. His love and compassion for humanity shines through in this heartfelt children's book, as well as in his broader mission to help our nation's youth.

As I read *My Huggy Bear*, I was reminded that life is better when someone who truly loves and supports you is part of the journey. The memories we make with family and loved ones are life's special treasures; they are what truly matter. *My Huggy Bear's* beautiful illustrations depict a diverse representation of families, allowing children from all backgrounds to relate to this important story. The book reminds me of my beautiful son, Myles, who still loves his very first blanket. It represents the love we've had since the moment we laid eyes on him and will forever have. The love Myles has for that old and tattered blanket is a physical example of the unconditional love and comfort we want him to always feel—even as we, like his blanket, are getting older and a bit tattered.

As the founder of the Otis and Rosie Brown Foundation and proud mother of three, I applaud Gene's commitment to helping our youth by creating Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America and donating proceeds from the book to this worthy initiative. He is an example of the capacity we all have to be extraordinary and represents the goodness of our millions of unsung heroes who give to communities in need all across our country.

Sometimes we all need a "Huggy Bear"—someone who will always be there for us. As an adult reading this book, it inspires me to be a Huggy Bear not just for my children but for everyone I have the opportunity to come in contact with.

**—Thasunda Brown Duckett**

**CEO of Chase Auto Finance at JPMorgan Chase**

**Founder of the Otis and Rosie Brown Foundation ([www.ExtraordinaryIs.org](http://www.ExtraordinaryIs.org))**



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### Helping Hands And Caring Hearts

O F A M E R I C A

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#### Who We Are

Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America (HHCHA) is a 501(c)3 organization created by Gene M. Legler in 2015 with the express intent of encouraging others to create learning experiences in the community and the classroom while helping the less fortunate.

#### Prepare 4 Tomorrow Scholarship

Through the Prepare 4 Tomorrow scholarship, HHCHA provides financial assistance to college-bound minority high-school seniors coming from low-income backgrounds. In return, each scholarship recipient performs community service with the HHCHA volunteer team. After completing their volunteer service requirements, the recipients will have fulfilled their duties and will be eligible to receive scholarship awards.

#### Mission

HHCHA got its start in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The long-term objective is to create a sustainable model and grow into other communities throughout the country.

For more information or to get involved with Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America, please visit [www.HelpingHandsAndCaringHeartsOfAmerica.org](http://www.HelpingHandsAndCaringHeartsOfAmerica.org).

All proceeds from the sale of *My Huggy Bear* directly benefit Helping Hands and Caring Hearts of America.



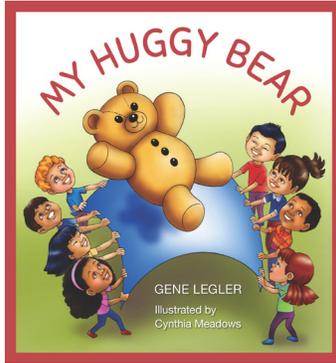
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Title.....My Huggy Bear  
 Author.....Gene Legler  
 ISBN-13.....978-1-61254-906-4  
 Format.....Hardcover  
 Retail Price.....\$16.99 U.S.  
 Size.....8” x 8”  
 Pages.....32  
 Carton Quantity.....20  
 LCCN.....2016939819  
 BISAC..... Juvenile Fiction / Animals /Bears  
 Publication Date.....August 15, 2016  
 Distribution.....Ingram, Baker & Taylor  
 Publisher.....Brown Books Publishing Group  
 Publisher Website.....www.BrownBooks.com  
 Author Website.....www.MyHuggyBear.com

We love the grocery store, the zoo, the carnival, and even bedtime! Swinging on swings, sliding down slides, riding on rides, and flying kites are all quite nice, but these are just a few of the activities Huggy Bear and I like to do. Join Huggy Bear and me and find out all of the wonderful adventures we can have.

In *My Huggy Bear*, Gene Legler writes about how much fun everything can be when you have your best friend by your side, and Cynthia Meadows brings these activities to life with colorful and engaging illustrations. Read *My Huggy Bear*, and discover all of the cool places you can take your own huggy bear!

**Marketing Budget: \$40,000 • National print, broadcast and digital campaign**



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