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How Hazel Edward's Grandchild Inspired 'Ho! Ho! Ho! There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Christmas Cake'.

Written by [Debbie Hatswell](#) in [Reading, Stress Free Christmas](#) on Nov 21, 2018.

Some time ago through my work with Story Mama and involvement with the Children's Book Council, I was delighted to meet Hazel Edward author of the classic Australian picture book "There's a Hippopotamus on the Roof Eating Cake". This is a fun story and was one of the first picture books that was gifted to my little boy when he was young.

Hazel has kindly told us the story behind her new Hippo book, Ho! Ho! Ho! There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Christmas Cake. This book was inspired by her second grandson Henry. He offered her a chimney for Santa as she only had a skylight. Henry had moved with his family into an older house in Oakleigh, which had two chimneys. (One spare!) He was very concerned about Santa. Grandma's house only had a skylight. How would Santa get in on Christmas Eve? So Henry kindly offered to loan Hazel a chimney.

Hazel often makes stories for her grandchildren as gift, and this was the early beginnings of "Skylight Santa" which eventually was adapted and published by Penguin books as "Ho! Ho! Ho There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Christmas Cake"

Hazel spends lots of time with her grandchildren both in person

and online. 8 year old Henry taught Grandma how to use Facetime and she helped him improve his reading fluency with their regular dates.

Hazel claims to be a digitally challenged, vintage grandma. She tries to learn one new digital skill per day. In exchange for the Facetime lessons from Henry, she helped him read more fluently. He was 7 when they started, and although interruptions occurred, they read every second night for about 9 months.

‘ Either we had two copies of the same picture book, or he had to angle the book so she could see or at least guess the words.

The choice of books was his. He liked ‘how to make’ or factual books. But one night he jokingly brought out ‘There’s a hippo...’and his mother Kim said, ‘At least we’ve got a copy each of that and I know which word comes next.’

Hazel says that ‘Food is the sex of children’s books’ and even though there’s food in all her stories, she says she is a bad cook. So the males in her family tend to do the cooking. And with all the cakes linked to the cake-eating hippo book, we’ve been offered amazing hippo shaped cakes, but the easiest to make is just the roof.’

Each birthday or Christmas, Hazel composes a book as a story gift of the imagination for her grandchildren. These are based on family photos from the current year and issues like ‘ Henry the Serial Sock Puller’ for the 2 year old. Her favourite was "The History Book of Ideas, but also others like the ‘ Who is Hiding?’ which is on Youtube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRpgjiVo_Is

We love hearing Hazel talk about being invited to visit her grandchildren's schools and that when she visited the 4 year old childcare room, Henry said, ‘Don’t all Grandmas write books?’ ‘Truman, now 19 , always preferred Mathew Reilly books. ‘Can’t you write more action in yours Grandma?’

One of the most creatively satisfying moments for Hazel was sitting in the audience of the Garry Ginnivan ‘Hippo Hippo the Musical’ with Henry alongside.

‘Suddenly I realized he was watching a performance of a story created from his Uncle and mother when they were younger than him.’

What a lucky family to have such a special grandmother! How do we get ourselves adopted Hazel?