

Creating Stories for Your Family

Unit 1: Gathering Ideas for Stories

Where to begin

Spend time creating stories for an important child in your life. It may be for your child, grandchild, nephew, niece, or step-child from a blended family.

Do you value creativity but feel electronic gadgets are taking over? Why not create a home-made story about familiar things? Or capture some family stories for younger relatives? Maybe create a story with or for the special child in your life.

Hazel Edwards

Genealogists often use Hazel's [Writing a Non Boring Family History](#) as a guideline.



An international conference speaker she was also a writer in residence in the Antarctic. [There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake](#) is just one of her 150 books for adults and children. www.hazeledwards.com

Be Clear Why You are Writing the Story

- To retain contact with the child
- Share a creative project
- Preserve memories so childlike sayings and perspectives are not lost
- Share family history
- Have fun.

Grandparents can use stories as a way of passing on their history and 'what it was like when', using photographs or clippings. This personalised story can also be a family gift to a household of different aged children.

The Basics Needed

- A familiar subject or experience which involves this child.
- Existing photos or pictures.
- Access/ability to key the story in large font into the computer and print the single pages. Or handwrite one page per picture.
- A 'slip in' see through folder of about 20 pages.

Your Special Child

- How old is your child/teenager? What is s/he interested in?
- What photographs or illustrations are available to you?
- A child who can not yet read, will rely on the position of the illustrations to remember the story.

Stories as Personal Gifts

My grandson is five and for each birthday and Christmas I've written him a story which related to something special in his life at the time. Admittedly it's easier if you're a children's author, but there's no reason why YOUR extended family or students can't benefit from your creativity too. Our first family story 27 years ago eventually became the classic Australian picture book *There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake*.

Brainstorming Topics

- Simple topics which are relevant to the child are best. Home. Pets. Holidays. Family. Sport. Hobbies.
- Birthdays are a favourite topic. 'Where Did My Birthday Leap To?' was especially written as a gift for Liam's family since he was born on February 29th and they couldn't find any picture stories to explain Leap Year.
- Choose a local situation or a funny saying. Choosing a name for a first baby was the basis of *Namelands* about a baby detouring through a land to choose a name before birth. It touches on family traditions, symbolic names, fashions and who chooses what. It also has 'basic clip art' inserts from the computer with pictures of road signs, books and babies. Plus it was later re-used for other new parents instead of a conventional baby card.
- Noisy stories. Listen and include unusual sounds. *Beep Beep Baby* was based on hi-tech 18 month olds who can switch on TV, are familiar with mobiles and respond to electronic microwave beeps.
- Question and answer works well. E.g. Question: Who lives in this house? Answer: Phantom, our dog. (Show photo of kennel.)
- Create an 'action' story where there's something for the child to do on each page. Action stories are really activities linked to key words like 'hug' or 'clap' or 'skip' which the child can do alongside the book reader. e.g. Truman can dance. Grandma can dance too.

- The trick is to write the story around the photos rather than make the photos fit the story. Take specific shots to match the words if you're desperate.

Sample Story: The Beep Beep Baby (An extract)

On the first day, Baby heard,
Beep. Beep. Beep.
Hospital noises were the first sounds.
Now Baby hears beeps,
Everywhere.

For the drive home, Dad fixes the seat-belt.
Beep. Beep. Beep.
Stop. Wait. Go.
School kids cross the road at the traffic lights.
Beep. Beep. Beep.
Baby listens.

Over the cot, Baby has a baby mobile.
Flutter. Flutter. Flutter.
Mum has a mobile too.
Beep. Beep. Beep.
Her mobile rings.
But where is it?

Baby is hungry.
Wah Wah Wah
Baby has a midnight snack attack.
The microwave is ready.
Beep. Beep. Beep.
But where is the bottle?

You get the idea.....?

Layout

- Repetition is important for a young child whether they read it alone or with you. Include sounds like ‘beep, beep, beep’ in threes, so they pick up the sound and the rhythm.
- Simplify. One sentence per page with an illustration. Include familiar words e.g. ball, car or swimming pool.
- Use a large but simple font.
- A researched family history story can be an appropriate present for older family members too.
- An e-story can be e-mailed to the child.

ACTION ACTIVITY

1. Choose a subject which interests the special child in your life.
2. Start to gather illustrations and photos.