



## Andy Griffiths – Q&A Session

Date: February 23, 2021

### Q: What's your favourite book that you've written? (Ben, Mirripoa PS)

My favourite book is usually the last one I wrote. So at the moment it's the intergalactic nonsense of *The 130-Storey Treehouse*.

### Q: What's your favourite book that you read as a child?

Some of my special favourites were *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* by Dr Seuss, *The Adventures of the Wishing Chair* by Enid Blyton and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl. I also loved sci-fi comics and MAD magazine.

### Q: What makes you proud as a writer?

That I have helped children to discover the same intense pleasure of reading that I had when I was growing up (and still have now!).

### Q: Why did you start writing the Treehouse series? Did you have any inspiration? (Harikiran, ARPS)

One day I asked Terry to draw a really big treehouse with lots of fun – but dangerous – levels. He drew a treehouse with 13 storeys and we thought it would be fun to write a book in which we imagined ourselves living in it and all the adventures we would have. We enjoyed writing the book so much we decided to do another one, maybe a series, and we decided to go up by 13 levels each time.

### Q: Did you always want to write books? (Maria, ARPS)

I've always enjoyed making up silly stories and I have written all my life for my own amusement and to make my family and friends laugh. I was constantly filling up exercise books with stories, jokes, cartoons, newspaper clippings, ticket stubs, bubblegum cards ... anything that interested and/or excited me.

### Q: How long does it usually take you to write one book?

Each book takes around 12 months: 3 months of planning, 3 months of writing and then 6 months of re-writing, editing and polishing. At the same time Terry spends many months drawing the roughs and the final artwork.

### Q: How do you think of such interesting ideas to put into your books? (Stevan, ARPS)

The best story ideas come from a long slow process of thinking, reading, researching, experimenting, drafting, editing and lots and lots of re-working and re-writing. The 'fuel' for those ideas come from everywhere: from books I read, TV shows and movies I watch and, of course, all the things that happen in everyday life.

### Q: Which do you think is your funniest book?

That's impossible to say, really, because each of the books in the Treehouse series is funny in its own particular way, but I'm pretty sure the Treehouse series is the funniest series of books that



Terry, Jill and I have created together. I think of each of the books as a chapter in a much longer and ridiculous story.

**Q: When did you write your first book and how old were you? (Ariel and Nathan, ARPS)**

I was writing and self-publishing books from the age of 5 but it wasn't until I was 35 years old that I had my first book, *Just Tricking*, officially published in 1997.

**Q: How many more books do you plan on writing in the Treehouse series? (Sam, ARPS)**

Well, we started with 13 levels and each book has 13 chapters and we add 13 new levels every year, so perhaps 13 books would be the perfect number, finishing with *The 169-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: Why did you choose Terry Denton to create your books with? (Year 4 Kingswood PS)**

A publisher suggested Terry and I should work together because she said we had a similar sense of humour and she thought we would get on well. She was right! His pictures give me lots of ideas for new stories and my stories give him lots of ideas for new pictures.

**Q: What inspired you to be an author? (Aviyah)**

As an English teacher I wrote little stories to amuse my students. I collected a few together and made photocopied books, which I shared with my students and friends. People liked them and I was encouraged to make more books and eventually I started doing it full time.

**Q: What's your favourite tree house level?**

It's hard to choose because they are all so random and unpredictable, but if pushed I would probably have to say the wrecking ball level in *The 143-Storey Treehouse* because it shows me 'accidentally' using Terry's head as a wrecking ball. (I've been planning revenge on him ever since he 'accidentally' used my head as a bowling ball in *The 13-Storey Treehouse*.)

**Q: How long does it take you to write a book from the first ideas to publishing? (Hugh, 5GR)**

Each book takes around 12 months: 3 months of planning, 3 months of writing and then 6 months of re-writing, editing and polishing. At the same time Terry spends many months drawing the roughs and the final artwork.

**Q: I'm a big fan of your books which one do you think was your best book you have written? (Lucas, ARPS)**

Well, I like them all, of course, but I think the Treehouse series as a whole is our very best work. I love the combination of fantasy, adventure and sheer silliness!

**Q: Which part of the writing process is your favourite? (5/6 A class, Rockbank)**

The plotting and planning at the start, when anything is possible. I love sitting down with a blank piece of paper and challenging myself to come up with the most far-fetched, funny and surprising things I can think of. Even better is when I get to sit down with Terry and Jill and we all throw ideas around and a story gradually emerges ... such fun!

**Q: Why did you choose a treehouse as the setting? (Melody)**

I used to live in a 3-storey townhouse that overlooked a park and when I was working there with Terry and making up imaginary stories it reminded me of playing make-believe games with my cousin David in his treehouse when we were kids.



**Q: Andy, what do you remember about Primary School and any stories that you wrote in Primary School?**

I enjoyed primary school – especially reading. I was an enthusiastic creative writer and wrote a story called ‘Lost in Time’ about being mysteriously transported many centuries into the future. (I’ve always loved time travel stories as you might know if you’ve read ‘The 65-Storey Treehouse’!)

**Q: When did you write your first book? (5G, Solway Primary School)**

The first book I had published by a publisher – as opposed to little books I used to publish myself – was *Just Tricking!* in 1997.

**Q: What inspired you to become an author? (Queenscliff Grade 5/6)**

As an English teacher I wrote little stories to amuse my students. I collected a few together and made photocopied books, which I shared with my students and friends. People liked them and I was encouraged to make more books and eventually I started doing it full time.

**Q: Are you glad you started writing? (Lexie, ARPS)**

Yes, I have always enjoyed writing and telling stories. I love that my (and Terry’s) books have brought so much pleasure to readers and that I have been able to spend my working life doing what I love.

**Q: Do you ever get sick of writing? What do you do when you need a break or need new inspiration?**

Like all things, sometimes writing can be hard work – especially in the rewriting and editing phase – and especially if the deadline is close! I do, however, make an effort to balance my day with exercise, reading, gardening and listening to music. These other activities allow me to rest and renew my energy ... and often creative solutions to whatever writing problem I’m working on will arise spontaneously while I’m doing one of these other non-writing activities.

**Q: Is Terry supposed to not do any work for the book?**

Terry does all the pictures; hundreds and hundreds of them. He also comes up with story ideas and makes suggestions for changes etc.

**Q: Do you have a treehouse at home?**

Sadly, no, but who needs a real treehouse when you’ve got an ever-expanding imaginary one? It certainly feels real to me.

**Q: How old were you when you published your first book? (Year 5, Eltham North)**

35 years old.

**Q: How many books have your written in total? (Leon ARPS)**

About 40 books.

**Q: Has your life changed since you have become an author?**

Not really. I’ve always spent a lot of time reading, writing and coming up with ideas for new books and stories. The main difference is that these days it has become my full-time job so I’m able to



spend most of each day doing these – and other book-related things (like answering these questions!)

**Q: Have you done any collaboration with other writers?**

No, just Terry. We seem to share an intuitive sense of where each of us wants to go and it's a very easy – and creatively fulfilling – partnership.

**Q: Are Mr Big Nose's kids based on real people?**

No! I just made them quite sweet and curious to explore the treehouse, just as any of our readers might be.

**Q: Andy, have you always had a love for writing? How do you get past a writer's block?**

I have always loved telling stories and writing. I have never really had writer's block.

**Q: Are any of your books going to be made into movies?**

Maybe one day, but we don't have any plans at the moment. The Just books were made into a cartoon series called *What's with Andy?* and the Bum series was also made into a cartoon series: *The Day my Butt went Psycho*.

**Q: How did you and Terry become friends?**

A publisher suggested Terry and I should work together because she said we had a similar sense of humour and she thought we would get on well. She was right! His pictures give me lots of ideas for new stories and my stories give him lots of ideas for new pictures.

**Q: How long has Andy been writing books? (Eli)**

I have been writing since I was a child but I didn't start having 'proper' books published until I was 35.

**Q: Do you have any siblings? (Chelsea, ARPS)**

I have 2 younger sisters.

**Q: Lockwood students would like to know where Terry is currently?**

He is at his house in Mornington doing the pictures for *The 143-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: What is your favourite character from all of your books?**

Andy of course! He's the best character in the world!

**Q: Where do you get the names for your characters in your books from?**

Some are named after real people, e.g. me, Terry and Jill (our editor and my wife in real life). Some are just silly names that describe the person, e.g. Mr Big Nose, Madam Know-it-all.

**Q: How many drafts did you have to write during the treehouse series? Have you ever gotten tired of editing and writing drafts, before you got to your final copy? (Jimmy, ARPS)**

I don't really know how many drafts I go through, but each book takes around 12 months: 3 months of planning, 3 months of writing and then 6 months of re-writing, editing and polishing. Sometimes I do get a bit frustrated with the editing and re-writing. I think that's the hardest bit.



**Q: What was the inspirations of the jokes in your books?**

I have always loved jokes and funny stories and read a lot of joke books when I was a kid.

**Q: Do you plan to stop writing the Treehouse series? (Harikiran, ARPS)**

Well, we started with 13 levels and each book has 13 chapters and we add 13 new levels every year so perhaps 13 books would be the perfect number, finishing with *The 169-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: Are you running out of ideas? (Henry)**

Each book is getting a little bit harder as I think of a great idea only to realise I had that same idea 3 books ago, but I haven't completely run out of ideas ... yet.

**Q: How many more books do you think there will be? (Ben)**

Well, we started with 13 levels and each book has 13 chapters and we add 13 new levels every year so perhaps 13 books would be the perfect number, finishing with *The 169-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: What is it about writing stories that you like? (Tex)**

What I like about writing stories is that in your imagination you can go anywhere and anything can happen. It's so much more fun than real life!

**Q: How do you get the inspiration for your writing? (Scarlett)**

I get inspiration from all over the place (conversations, TV, movies, etc) but I guess most of my ideas come from reading other people's books (both fiction and non-fiction).

**Q: Are any references from the book, real references from your life? (Shariah. ARPS)**

Quite a lot of them are. Some of the characters (e.g. me, Terry and Jill) are based on real people and Jill used to have a cat called Silky. In real life my parents were quite mean when I was young and made me go to school five days a week, eat with a knife and a fork (not my hands) and brush my teeth and hair regularly. And I really did have a bad toothache a few years ago and spent quite a bit of time at the dentists. That was the inspiration for *The 104-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: How did you think of Mr Big Nose? (Alisha, ARPS)**

In real life our publisher is a very nice woman with a regular-sized nose, but I always think a story is more fun if there is a 'big bad wolf' in it. I wouldn't want to read a story about 3 little pigs who built a house made of straw, encountered no problems and lived happily ever after. So, Mr Big Nose is our big bad wolf.

**Q: What is the history behind the monkey house? (Stevan, ARPS)**

Many years ago, I participated in the London Zoo's 'Be a Zoo Keeper for a day' program. I'm pretty sure it was when I was mucking out the giraffe enclosure and the air was full of dust and straw and giraffe-dung stink I thought *I NEVER want to be a Zoo Keeper!*

I remembered this feeling when I was writing the scene in *The 13-Storey Treehouse* where Mr Big Nose threatens them that they'd better write the book ... or else. I changed the giraffes to monkeys, however, because monkeys are funnier than giraffes. (Why are monkeys funnier than giraffes? I don't know ... they just are!)

**Q: Where did you find the butt tree? (Ameyaa, Year 3)**



A family friend sent it to me. They saw it on holidays and thought I'd like to see it too. They were right.

**Q: How long have you been writing for? Do you ever get stuck for idea? (Blake)**

I have been writing ever since I was young but I didn't get my first 'proper' book published until I was 35. I don't struggle too much to come up with ideas. They come from everywhere: from books I read, TV shows and movies I watch and, of course, all the things that happen in everyday life.

**Q: Do you Terry and Jill argue over each book? (Shariah, ARPS)**

No, we tend to work fairly harmoniously. We all want what's best for the book, rather than to have our idea 'win', so we don't fight or argue – we discuss until we are all happy.

**Q: Does Jill like pets in real life? (Hannah)**

In real life Jill loves animals and she grew up in a house full of pets. She has 2 brothers and 2 sisters and everyone had at least one pet so there were a lot – cats, dogs, guinea pigs, rabbits, fish, birds etc. She has only one pet now though, a cat called Ruby and she used to have a cat called Silky.

**Q: Have you ever considered making an animated version of the treehouse movie? (Charlie, ARPS)**

We have talked about it, but we don't have any definite plans at the moment.

**Q: Do you have a tree house in real life? (Nicoletta, ARPS)**

Sadly, no.

**Q: From Millie: Were any of your family members writers? (Millie)**

I am the only published writer in my family but my family have always enjoyed writing things to amuse each other, for example we exchange silly birthday cards and when on holidays we send each other stupid postcards.

**Q: Is Mr Big Nose based on a real person? (Brett)**

In real life our publisher is a very nice woman with a regular-sized nose but I like having a bossy, angry character. I find that funny and it puts Andy and Terry under time pressure, which helps move the story along.

**Q: Where did 13 come from? (Josh)**

The first treehouse Terry drew just happened to have 13 levels and I liked that because I know some people are superstitious about the number 13 (I'm not).

**Q: Will the treehouse ever run out of space?**

No, but I think we will stop when we have written 13 books, finishing with *The 169-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: Who is your favourite character from your books?**

Andy, of course!

**Q: Is Mr Big Nose actually your publisher?**



No, thank goodness. The story of the three little pigs wouldn't be nearly as exciting—or as much fun—if there wasn't a big bad wolf huffing and puffing and threatening to blow their houses down. Mr Big Nose is like the big bad wolf, except that he huffs and puffs and threatens to send us back to the monkey house if we don't get our book written on time. In real life our publisher is a woman called Claire who has a regular-sized nose and never loses her temper.

**Q: Are you going to write another book for the 'Just' series?**

I'm too busy doing Treehouse books at the moment but maybe one day ...

**Q: What do you do if you get writer's block?**

If you are having trouble getting started writing I find a good thing to do is set a timer for 5 minutes and just write about anything, you can even write about the fact that you can't think of anything to write about. Don't think too hard about it, just write and you may find that before you know it you have found something to write about.

**Q: Do you actually live in a treehouse?**

No, but when I started the series I did live in a 3-storey townhouse and I'm really good at exaggerating. Like, I'm probably the best exaggerator in the whole world!

**Q: How did you meet Terry? (Queenscliff Grade 5/6)**

A publisher suggested Terry and I should work together because she said we had a similar sense of humour and she thought we would get on well. She was right! His pictures give me lots of ideas for new stories and my stories give him lots of ideas for new pictures.

**Q: When is the new book coming out?**

*The Treehouse Joke Book 2* will come out in April 2021 and *The 143-Storey Treehouse* will come out in October 2021.

**Q: Who is going to win Godzilla or King Kong? (Tucker Road Bentleigh Primary)**

Definitely King Kong!

**Q: How many Treehouse books will you make? (Bella, Tucker Road Bentleigh Primary)**

Well, we started with 13 levels and each book has 13 chapters and we add 13 new levels every year so perhaps 13 books would be the perfect number, finishing with *The 169-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: I really like your books and I wish you lots of luck for the next one. (Remy, Grade 1, Tucker Road Bentleigh Primary)**

Thanks, Remy!

**Q: How do you come up with so many ideas for all your stories?**

The best story ideas come from a long slow process of thinking, reading, researching, experimenting, drafting, editing and lots and lots of re-working and re-writing. The 'fuel' for those ideas come from everywhere: from books I read, TV shows and movies I watch and, of course, all the things that happen in everyday life.

**Q: Why did you decide to use your real names instead of made up names? - Lucy**

I find it easier to write if I imagine myself – and people I know – into the story.



**Q: What are your other hobbies apart from reading and writing? (Chelsea, Grade 5W)**

I love listening to music, going to see live music, watching movies and comedy shows, gardening and exercising (working out with weights, swimming and running).

**Q: Is Terry there? Can we see him? (Hux, Grade 2)**

Terry is at his house in Mornington working on the drawings for *The 143-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: What made you decide to become an author? (Riley, Grade 4B)**

I have always loved reading and that made me want to write my own stories. I did this for my own amusement or to amuse my friends and family. Then, when I was an English teacher I had many students who did not like reading at all. So, I started writing really short stories to amuse them. I collected a few of these together and made photocopied books, which I shared with my students and friends. People liked them and I was encouraged to make more books and eventually I started doing it full time.

**Q: Where do you live in Australia? (Luca, Grade 3)**

In Williamstown, Victoria, near the beach.

**Q: What were you wondering when you wrote the snookle? (not sure if that is spelt correctly)**

I'm not sure I even know what a snookle is?!

**Q: Andy, what do you remember about Primary School and any stories you wrote back then?**

I really enjoyed primary school. I remember laughing at silly jokes like 'Why did the boy fall off his bike? Because his mum threw a fridge at him.'

I wrote a story called 'Lost in Time' about being mysteriously transported many centuries into the future. (I've always loved time travel stories!)

**Q: Can you make a water slide level? (Murphy)**

Sounds good, but I think I'd have to make it dangerous somehow so it's more fun.

**Q: Any tips for writing books? (Patrick, ARPS)**

Get an exercise book and write in it every day... 5 minutes a day to start with, and gradually increase to at least 30 minutes a day. You get better at writing like you get better at everything else, through constant practice. A good idea is to write the sort of stories that you love to read because, without realising it, you know a lot about this particular type of story and how it is supposed to work.

**Q: How did you get the idea that he can't count in the book?**

In real life I am not that good with numbers and found maths hard to do at school. So I just really exaggerated it so Andy in the books can't even count to ten.

**Q: Idea from Fraser: A cosy level set in Scotland.**

Thanks, Fraser! I'll add it to my very long list of possible levels.



**Q: My students would like to know how you got the idea of Mr Big Nose?**

I think a story is more fun if there is a mean or angry character causing problems for the main characters. Mr Big Nose is like the big bad wolf in the story of the Three Little pigs – he huffs and puffs and threatens to send us back to the monkey house if we don't get our book written on time. In real life our publisher is a woman called Claire who doesn't have a bad temper

**Q: How old were you when you came up with the ideas for the treehouse books and then how much time passed before the book was published? (Alex, Eltham North Primary School)**

I think I was about 48 years old when Terry and I first started working on the first Treehouse book. It took about 2 years to get from early ideas to published book.

**Q: How many books have you written in your career? (Xander, Year 3 KPS)**

About 40 books.

**Q: What inspired you to write treehouse stories? (5G Solway Primary School)**

One day I asked Terry to draw a really big treehouse with lots of fun—but dangerous—levels. He drew a treehouse with 13 storeys and we thought it would be fun to write a book in which we imagined ourselves living in it and all the adventures we would have. We enjoyed writing the book so much we decided to do another one, maybe a series, and we decided to go up by 13 levels each time.

**Q: What's your favourite book you've written? (Lexi and Tilly)**

My favourite book is usually the last one I wrote. So at the moment it's *The 130-Storey Treehouse*.

**Q: What inspired Andy to become an author and how did he publish his first book? (Kane)**

As an English teacher I wrote little stories to amuse my students. I collected a few together and made photocopied books, which I shared with my students and friends. People liked them and I was encouraged to make more books and eventually I started doing it full time.

I had a lot of very short pieces about practical jokes. I met a publisher and she said they were too short to publish so I invented the character Andy, who likes playing practical jokes, expanded the stories and then the publisher said she would publish the book. This was my first 'proper' children's book, *Just Tricking!* (published 1997).

**Q: Does Jill really like animals?**

Yes! She loves animals but in real life only has one pet, a cat called Ruby.

**Q: What are some of the things you have in the background? Like the skeleton in the rainbow wig. (Yinnar South Primary School)**

I like collecting crazy things and displaying them in my studio where I do most of my writing. I especially like skulls and skeletons.

**Q: How old were you when you started writing? (Amaia, Grade 3, Yinnar South Primary School)**

I have written ever since I was young, but I didn't become a published author until I was 35.



**Q: What book are you most proud of?**

I'm proud of all the books I've ever published (if I wasn't, I wouldn't have published them!). The series I'm most proud of, however, is The Treehouse Series. It combines all of my favourite types of story telling from all of the other books.

**Q: Why did you put Jill in your book? (Ashton, Eltham North Primary School)**

I just thought it would be fun to put her in the book too since she works with me and Terry (she is a book editor). In real life Jill helps solve our story problems and in the books she helps solve our animal problems.

**Q: They would also like to know why you wanted payback on Terry for using your head and if he is going to make an appearance today?**

If your best friend used YOUR head as a bowling ball I'm sure you'd want payback too! And no, he won't be making an appearance today because his head is a bit broken after I used it as a wrecking ball.

**Q: Has there been a book that's been particularly tricky to write? (Wangaratta West Primary School)**

They are all tricky in their own way, but *The 130 Storey Treehouse* was especially tricky to write because there was so much intergalactic action. The first draft was VERY long and it took quite a few months to boil it down to the essentials and make it fast, funny and comprehensible.

**Q: Have you written any books about chickens? (Rupert, Year 3)**

No, but Terry did draw a mechanical chicken on the cover of *Just Crazy!* because there is mention of a story about mechanical chickens in that book.

**Q: Can you make a Lego level? (Jonah, Grade 2)**

I'd like to but I might get in trouble with the Lego company.

**Q: Or a soccer level?**

We have an all-ball sports level so you can play soccer there if you like.

**Q: When/What age did you know you wanted to become a writer?**

I don't remember thinking 'I want to be a writer' I just always loved reading and enjoyed writing things to amuse myself and my family and friends. I did this all through my childhood. It wasn't until I was an adult (in my late 20s, early 30s) that I decided to get 'serious' about being a writer.