

Life lessons with quails

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
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New Mexico author teaches through stories

Hazel Rosenthal spends her retirement going on walks with her husband. During these walks, they often see coveys of quail. Seeing these birds scurry around, Rosenthal was struck with an idea: what if she wrote a children's book about them and their antics?

Thus, the *Henry and Friends* series was born. *Ernesto Joked* is the most recent book in the series, and it follows Rosenthal's cast of quail characters who reside along the bosque of the Rio Grande and fictionalizes what they do when a predator approaches.

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“One of the things I observed and I really think is very brave of quail is if there is a predator in the vicinity, one or two of them will distract the predator so that the rest of the covey can find a good hiding place. And I thought ‘that needs to be a story,’” Rosenthal explained in an interview with the *Sun*.

In the story, Ernesto “distracts” the coyote by telling him a joke.

Rosenthal’s stories include vocabulary to help kids learn about nature, and she also mixes in some Spanish words as well. She tries to show the beauty of New Mexico through her writing.

“I think New Mexico is a beautiful place, and I especially love the bosque,” she said.

Rosenthal’s faith is an important part of her life, and each of her four books includes a passage from the Bible.

“I like to tell stories that are kind of in the vein of fables, where there’s a lesson to be learned, a life lesson,” she said. “So I try to equate it also with scripture verses because we are church goers so I thought it was right to include that part of my life and share it with readers.”

Children can learn about courage, resilience, honesty, and jealousy through Rosenthal’s books.

Writing was always a dream, but between raising her two daughters and working for the federal government as a contract specialist, Rosenthal had a limited amount of time. She took time off work while her daughters were young but went back to work once they were both in middle school.

She often took her daughters to the library and tried to instill the love of reading in them.

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“I specifically enjoyed reading them bedtime stories and just kind of fell in love with the idea of writing my own [children’s book] because I think they’re so creative and there’s so much to be learned from a picture book. I thought I’d like to be a part of that,” Rosenthal explained.

She also noted how a good book cannot often help a child.

“One of the other reasons is I know life can be very difficult and when you lose yourself in a book – especially for a child a picture book – it kind of gives you a reprieve from the harshness of the world,” she said. “If I can leave the readers smiling, I feel like I’ve met my goal.”

Now that she’s written four books about New Mexican quail, Rosenthal said she’s ready to move on to new characters. *Ernesto Joked* features a coyote, and another one of her books had a roadrunner side character. Rosenthal said she’s already got a few ideas that would feature them.

To purchase one of Rosenthal’s books, visit [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and search Henry and Friends.

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