

Di Morrissey's family joy I'M A DOTING GRANDMA!

Success as an author is great, but nothing means more to Di Morrissey than sharing precious moments with her family, writes
CRAIG BENNETT

As the reigning queen of Australian fiction, with a string of bestsellers behind her, Di Morrissey is someone who is very rarely lost for words – except when it comes to her beloved family.

Indeed, the self-confessed dotting grandmother is practically speechless when three generations of her family gather at her daughter Gabrielle's home on Queensland's Gold Coast to celebrate Mother's Day.

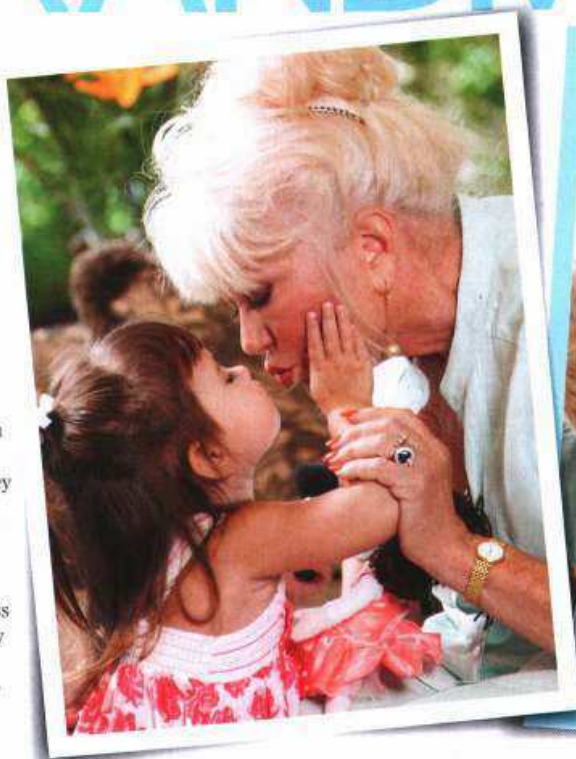
"I truly can't stop smiling. It's magic," says Di as she lovingly holds granddaughter Sonoma, 2, and grandson Everton, 9 months, in her arms. "Words cannot describe the joy of being a grandmother – or 'Gigi', as I'm known.

"We don't use the word 'grandmother' in our family. I'm affectionately known as Gigi, which we decided stands for glorious, gorgeous, generous, gregarious grandmother! Gigi is what Sonoma called me when she first started to speak, and it's so beautiful it stuck!"

Clearly revelling as she plays with the youngsters, Di, 63, reveals her greatest regret is not living closer to Gabrielle, 39, and her grandchildren. The distance between them, combined with her heavy work schedule, makes occasions like this all too rare.

Fortunately, technology is playing a role in keeping her family together.

"Sonoma is only two and she's already Skyping," boasts Di, who lives near Taree



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on the NSW mid-North Coast. "We have some wonderful chats on Skype – and Everton, bless him, is beginning to get in on the act as well."

There is another reason mum-of-two Di suspects this could be her best Mother's Day yet. Her son Nicolas, 37, who lives in the US, expects to become a dad any day now. Di won't be there to help welcome the little one into the world but she can barely contain herself.

"What a truly wonderful Mother's Day gift – a third grandchild!" she exclaims. "The exhilaration is incredible."

The new addition will doubtless add to Di's growing legion of fans. It's certainly a long way from her early days of storytelling while

growing up in Wingham, just up the road from where she now lives.

"When I was five, I'd sit in my grandparents' old mulberry tree and tell the chooks stories," recalls Di with a smile. "They were a very appreciative audience for my fantastic yarns."

Her family later moved to Pittwater, north of Sydney, where her neighbours included rugged Aussie movie star Chips Rafferty and legendary poet Dorothea Mackellar.

Both became important mentors in Di's life, especially after her father and younger brother died in a boating accident when she was 10.

"I was still so young... it was difficult to get my head around what had happened." ▶

Spending Mother's Day with daughter Gabrielle and grandchildren Everton and Sonoma will make it even more special for Di.





she says. "In many ways, it still is. Thereafter, the family was held together thanks to my very strong mother, Kay. But it was Dorothea who suggested I put everything in writing so I could later share my stories with others."

In the wake of that tragedy, Di believes Mother's Day became an even more special, albeit emotional, time for her.

"For most of my life I didn't have a father, so Mother's Day was even more celebrated and important," she explains.

Ultimately, though, those experiences helped inspire her to write. Despite a glittering career in television, which saw her interview Hollywood stars for morning TV's *Good Morning Australia* during the 80s, she traded it in to follow her dream.

"We first met when I was 15 – Boris was seven years older and I thought he was just the most exotic and handsome man," she says. "But I was still at school and way too young for romance. Fast-forward 30 years, we met at a dinner party and the sparks of love flew.

"Not only that, but I'm back living in the beautiful Manning Valley, with Boris, just a stone's throw from Wingham, where I was brought up."

Most of all, Di takes comfort in the knowledge her growing clan can gather

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"I'd always wanted to write," Di says. "It was a lifelong burning desire, and Dorothea Mackellar's advice niggled.

"I learned you should never give up on your dreams. I was nearly 40 when my first book came out. I tell everyone, 'Whatever you do, don't give up on your dreams, because they do come true'."

Di's romantic life has also come full circle. For the past 12 years she's been in a relationship with cinematographer and documentary maker Boris Janjic,

together on special occasions – such as Mother's Day – and be there for each other. After all, that's what family are for.

"Mum and I just had each other after the accident [that killed her dad and brother]," she says, looking around the room at her daughter and Gabrielle's gorgeous children. "So to become a mother then a grandmother myself feels deeply significant.

"The sense of continuation, especially after Mum's death in 2007, is immensely comforting for me."

You're never too young to learn the gift of storytelling.

