

For each life, many stories, memories to share

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Margaret Randall is the creator of TellOurLifeStories.com, a web site devoted to uniting people in the telling of their stories. Here she and her niece Katie visit the Getty Museum.

whomever they choose. It also features a "showcase" collection of stories available for all subscribers to read.

Randall was inspired to establish the Web site after her mother told her about her courageous great-grandmother who left her husband because he had a drinking problem, even though that kind of independence among women was unheard of in the Polish Catholic neighborhoods where she lived in South Milwaukee.

"If my mom hadn't told me that story, how would I have known my great-grandmother had such character, and raised a family of five children all by herself?"

Do you wish your relatives, especially the ones from previous generations, had written down their life stories so that you and your children could have treasured memories of your family history?

If you said yes, you're not alone. In a recent Harris Interactive Survey of 1,200 baby boomers, 91 percent said they would rather inherit family stories from their parents than money or property.

In tune with her generation, 56-year-old Margaret Randall of San Anselmo has made it easier for families to share those cherished memories with her new Web site, TellOurLifeStories.com.

"I have always been interested in people telling their life stories," she says. "That's how we get to know who we are. It tells us a lot about ourselves."

Her site provides a secure environment for subscribers to write and share their stories with



she says. "As a former journalist, the value of hearing stories from previous generations hits home for me."

With TellOurLifeStories.com, Randall joins online sites such as LifeBio.Com and the Center for Digital Storytelling.

She sets herself apart by creating a fundraising partnership with several nonprofits, including Big Brothers Big Sisters of the North Bay, Senior Access, Best Buddies and the Parent Services Project. Randall donates 30 percent of the \$24.99 subscription price to the organization of the subscriber's choice.

In connection with Tell OurLifeStories, Senior Access has started a program called LifeTimes, in which volunteers interview seniors about their lives and post their stories on the TellOurLifeStories site. Those wishing to volunteer may contact Senior Access at 448-0358 or e-mail info@senioraccess.org.

"It's been a delightful opportunity for our participants," says Andrea Goldfien, Senior Access development director. "It started out as a fundraising opportunity, and we've already gotten some money from it, which is wonderful. And, since so many of our seniors are living with Alzheimer's, it's also become a precious thing to do."

Like Senior Access, Big Brothers Big Sisters has embraced the site as more than just a way to raise money.

"We're using it ourselves to capture and preserve the stories of friendship that our Big Brothers and Big Sisters share," says Katie Hamilton, corporate relations and event manager. "We encourage people to support our work and tell their stories."

Recognizing that some people have no writing experience, Randall is offering online writing classes as well as teleconference sessions with successful memoir writers. At 5 p.m. Feb. 6, she and writer Jay Speyerer will discuss his "Story System" in a free live teleconference.

"We'll talk about how to begin and provide some ideas about topics for getting started," she says.

An interview Randall did with Natalie Goldberg, author of "Writing Down the Bones," is also posted on the site.

A former promotion director for the Marin Independent Journal, Randall now works in the financial services field and operates the Web site as a hobby.

"We have less than 100 subscribers so far, but we've only been out there for six months and we're growing," she says. "What I'm seeing is that subscribers really want to share with family and friends and to add to the showcase collection for others to read. I'm happy with the way it's going."