

Finding Aid to the Her Interactive, Inc. Collection, 1996-2012

Summary Information

Title: Her Interactive, Inc. Collection

Creator: Her Interactive, Inc. (primary)

ID: 113.2102

Date: 1996-2012 (inclusive); 1999-2005 (bulk)

Extent: 3.25 linear feet

Language: The materials in this collection are in English, unless otherwise noted.

Abstract: The Her Interactive, Inc. Collection is a compilation of notes, correspondence, newspaper and magazine articles, questionnaires, release forms, press releases, VHS tapes, DVDs, and a comprehensive game design binder. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1999 and 2005.

Repository:

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
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Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Use: This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives. Though the donor has not transferred intellectual property rights (including, but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, they have given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.

Custodial History: The Her Interactive Collection was donated to The Strong in May 2012 as a gift from Megan Gaiser of Her Interactive, Inc. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under Object ID 113.2102. The papers were received from Megan Gaiser of Her Interactive, Inc., in three boxes. Numerous electronic games from Her Interactive, Inc. were also donated to The Strong at the same time.

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Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names

- Gaiser, Megan

Corporate Names

- Her Interactive, Inc.
- Simon and Schuster, Inc.

Subjects

- Computer adventure games
- Computer games
- Computer games industry
- Computer games--design.
- Computer games--Juvenile literature.
- Games for girls--Computer games.
- Girls' computer network resources
- Mystery and detective stories
- Nancy Drew (Fictitious character)
- Nancy Drew (Her Interactive, Inc.)
- Nancy Drew dossier
- Teenage girls

Historical Note

Her Interactive, Inc. was founded in 1995 as a division of American Laser Games. At the time, there were no major computer game designers in the United States concentrating on games for girls. Her Interactive performed research studies and gathered focus groups of adolescent and teenage girls to determine what girls wanted in a computer game. Their results found that girls were dissatisfied with violence, secret rules, and lackluster storylines in the existing PC games market. Her Interactive soon published its first titles, *McKenzie & Company* (1995) and *The Vampire Diaries* (1997). Two years later, Her Interactive acquired licensing rights from Simon & Schuster Publishing to develop a Nancy Drew mystery computer game series, demonstrating a clear understanding of what would be rewarding for girl gamers while faithfully adapting the Nancy Drew canon. In 1998, Her Interactive released *Nancy Drew: Secrets Can Kill* to much acclaim. Several additional titles in the Nancy Drew series were released in the late 1990s.

Her Interactive utilized its in-house “teen advisory board” to make improvements to story ideas and characters; they added varying skill levels, directive statements, and second chances to fix critical errors made during missions. Users and critics lauded smart, adventurous Nancy Drew as an ideal character and role model for girls. Games from Her Interactive were targeted at girls aged 10-15, though the games had broad appeal. Her Interactive continued their focus on creating challenging, fun, and collaborative gameplay, and they have released over 25 games in the Nancy Drew series. Her Interactive has sold more than 9 million Nancy Drew games, making it the number one mystery franchise in the PC game market.

Her Interactive has significantly impacted the computer games industry with their successful development of high-quality, creative games for girls of all ages. They did not simply package their products in pink boxes and declare them “for girls”-- they put great effort into researching what types of games and features would appeal to young female gamers. Her Interactive’s singular focus on games for girls, along with its longevity, has made it stand out from other companies.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Her Interactive, Inc. collection contains materials from 1996-2012. This collection holds a sampling of internal files from Her Interactive along with information on game design and the company's teen advisory board. A substantial portion of this collection is newspaper and magazine articles focusing on Her Interactive, computer games for girls, and the growth of that particular market from the late 1990s on. Materials in this collection include notes, correspondence, newspaper and magazine articles, questionnaires, release forms, press releases, VHS tapes, DVDs, and a comprehensive game design binder.

This collection has been arranged into five series, with one further divided into subseries. The materials are housed in six archival document boxes.

System of Arrangement

Series I: Game production, 1999-2012

Series II: Advisory panel and focus groups, 1997-2012

Series III: Her Interactive, Inc. internal files, 1997-2012

Series IV: Awards, 1999-2011

Series V: News and publicity, 1996-2012

Subseries A: Newspaper and magazine articles

Subseries B: Video coverage

Subseries C: Media binders

Contents List

Series I: Game production, 1999-2012

Scope and Content Note: This series contains design information and publicity materials on several of Her Interactive's Nancy Drew personal computer games. Of note is the game production binder for *Nancy Drew: Stay Tuned for Danger*, which features sections on the story summary, character development, walkthroughs, puzzles, art manuals, engine summaries, storyboards, and graphics. Game design documentation for the Nancy Drew Mobile Mystery game *Shadow Ranch* is also housed in Box 6. The "Nancy Drew - Media Collateral" CD has files such as fact sheets, graphics, press releases, and walkthroughs for the first eleven titles in the Nancy Drew series.

The game design notes for *Nancy Drew: Tomb of the Lost Queen* also includes the 2012 correspondence between the family of Rachel Vaughn and Her Interactive; Vaughn was a seventeen-year-old girl with terminal kidney cancer, and she requested to visit the Her Interactive studios through the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Sadly, Vaughn passed away before her scheduled visit. Her Interactive dedicated *Tomb of the Lost Queen* to Rachel Vaughn, named a character after her, and inserted images of her throughout the game.

Box 1

- Folder 1 *Nancy Drew: Tomb of the Lost Queen* game design notes and correspondence, 2012
- Folder 2 *Nancy Drew: Message in a Haunted Mansion* fact sheet, 2000
- Folder 3 "Nancy Drew - Media Collateral" CD, 2004
- Folder 4 Game production reference, *The Moonstone Castle Mystery* book
- Folder 5 *Nancy Drew: Stay Tuned for Danger* packaging, 2001
- Folder 6 Graphic designs for game packaging, 2002-2003
- Folder 7 Nancy Drew Mobile Game - demo storyboards, 2012

Box 6

- Object 1 *Nancy Drew: Stay Tuned for Danger* game production binder, 1999
- Object 2 Nancy Drew Mobile Mysteries: *Shadow Ranch* (iSHA) Design Documents, 2010

Series II: Advisory panel and focus groups, 1997-2012

Scope and Content Note: This series holds information on the teen advisory panel and focus group studies conducted by Her Interactive between 1997 and 2000, with one sample from 2012. Her Interactive developed their approach to creating fun, challenging computer games for girls of all ages based on feedback from their advisory panel members.

Box 1

- Folder 8 Focus group discussion guides, 1997
- Folder 9 Focus group notes, *Nancy Drew: Secrets Can Kill*, 1997-1998
- Folder 10 Teen advisory panel enrollment, completed questionnaires, 1998-1999
- Folder 11 Game evaluation forms, *Nancy Drew: Secrets Can Kill*, 1998-1999
- Folder 12 Minor release forms (completed), 1998-2000
- Folder 13 Advisory panel member notebook for *Nancy Drew: Message in a Haunted Mansion*, 2000
- Folder 14 Focus group exercises example, *Nancy Drew: Tomb of the Lost Queen*, 2012

Series III: Her Interactive, Inc. internal files, 1997-2012

Scope and Content Note: This series includes a sampling of internal corporate files from Her Interactive, including public relations materials, contest results, licensing agreements, and correspondence.

Box 2

- Folder 1 Her Interactive, Inc. culture values, undated
- Folder 2 Public relations exposure plan, January-June 1997
- Folder 3 Photographs, c. 1998
- Folder 4 Her Interactive Preliminary Evaluation, Marketing/PR Department, 1998
- Folder 5 Corporate client packet, 1998
- Folder 6 *Nancy Drew: Secrets Can Kill* reviewer's guide, 1998
- Folder 7 Her Interactive partner prospectus for Oxygen Media, March 1999
- Folder 8 Debrief for *Nancy Drew: Message in a Haunted Mansion*, c. 2000
- Folder 9 Key message for Her Interactive, Inc., c. 2000
- Folder 10 HerInteractive.com website analysis, c. 2000
- Folder 11 Dream Catcher press release, 2000
- Folder 12 Product donations, 2000-2004
- Folder 13 Carousel contest, 2003-2004
- Folder 14 Alloy/360 Youth ad campaigns, 2004
- Folder 15 Select Ware LLC information, 2004
- Folder 16 Store call reports, 2004
- Folder 17 Model release and minor release forms (blank), 2004-2005
- Folder 18 Holiday 2004 contest, 2004-2005
- Folder 19 License agreements, Stream Theory and Yummy, 2005
- Folder 20 Simon & Schuster, *Nancy Drew* 75th anniversary, 2005
- Folder 21 Correspondence from users, 2005, 2011
- Folder 22 Her Interactive Selected Press Coverage and Customer Feedback, 2008
- Folder 23 PC Game sales numbers, June-October 2010

Series IV: Awards, 1999-2011

Scope and Content Note: This series houses a plaque and several certificates from various parenting associations who awarded honors to Her Interactive for their excellence in software for girls in the 10-18 age bracket. (Her Interactive has won dozens of awards for their Nancy Drew series since 1999.) Megan Gaiser was also honored with the 2011 Trailblazer Award at IndieCade for her pioneering work with girls' games in the videogame industry.

Box 3

- Folder 1 Appreciation plaque for Megan Gaiser, 1999
- Folder 2 National Parenting Publication Awards (NAPPA) gold award, 2000
- Folder 3 Parent's Choice Awards, 2000-2001
- Folder 4 Various awards and applications, 2000-2001
- Folder 5 IndieCade 2011, International Festival of Independent Games, 2011

Series V: News and publicity, 1996-2012**Subseries A: Newspaper and magazine articles**

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains articles from Her Interactive's subscription news clipping service in 1996 and 1997, along with later articles saved by staff. The articles concentrate on the computer game industry and the development of games for girls. While the focus is on Her Interactive, products from other companies such as Mattel, Purple Moon, The Learning Company, Girl Games, and Girl Tech are highlighted as well.

Box 4

- Folder 1 Newspaper and magazine articles, 1996
- Folder 2 Newspaper and magazine articles, January-May 1997
- Folder 3 Newspaper and magazine articles, June 1997
- Folder 4 Newspaper and magazine articles, July-August 1997
- Folder 5 Newspaper and magazine articles, September-October 1997
- Folder 6 Newspaper and magazine articles, November-December 1997
- Folder 7 Newspaper and magazine articles, 1999-2012

Subseries B: Video coverage

Scope and Content Note: This subseries includes recorded media appearances of Her Interactive staff members, preview reels for games in the Nancy Drew series, and a VHS copy of *The Video Game Revolution*.

Broadcast on PBS, *The Video Game Revolution* examines the growth of the videogame and computer game industries along with the impact of gaming on society and culture. Megan Gaiser, then president of Her Interactive, provided interviews and insights into "girls' gaming" for this documentary. The accompanying PBS website for "The Video Game Revolution" posted Gaiser's essay, "Solving the Mystery of the Missing Girl Games," and a copy has been printed and added to the folder with this video. Additional VHS and DVD copies of *The Video Game Revolution* can be found in the library stacks at the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong.

Box 5

- Folder 1 Her Interactive sample reel, VHS tape, September 2000
- Folder 2 Nancy Drew game previews, VHS tapes, c. 2002-2003, and mini-DVD, 2004
- Folder 3 *The Video Game Revolution*, VHS tape, 2004
- Folder 4 Her Interactive segment on “King 5 Live” (Seattle), VHS tape and DVD, February 2005

Subseries C: Media binders

Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses Her Interactive compilations of media reviews for the Nancy Drew games *Secrets Can Kill*, *Stay Tuned for Danger*, *Message in a Haunted Mansion*, *Treasure in the Royal Tower*, and *Secret of the Scarlet Hand*.

Box 6

- Object 3 *Nancy Drew: Secrets Can Kill* media coverage binder, 1998-1999
- Object 4 *Nancy Drew: Stay Tuned for Danger* media coverage binder, 1999-2000
- Object 5 *Nancy Drew: Message in a Haunted Mansion* media coverage binder, 2000-2001
- Object 6 *Nancy Drew: Treasure in the Royal Tower* media coverage binder, 2001-2002
- Object 7 *Nancy Drew: Secret of the Scarlet Hand* media coverage binder, 2002

Revision Note

“Extent” under Summary Information section was updated to reflect revision to “linear feet.”