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: 3.5 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
One Manhattan Square
Rochester, New York 14607
585.263.2700
library@museumofplay.org

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. An additional lot of papers (approx. 0.2 linear feet) was received from Gaiser in December 2018 and accessioned under Object ID 118.10789.
Preferred citation for publication: Her Interactive, Inc. Collection, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
Processed by: Julia Novakovic, May-June 2013, May 2019
Revision Note: Revised in May 2019 to reflect addition of second accession lot.

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 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 10  Teen advisory panel enrollment, completed questionnaires, 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.

Added to this series in 2019 were folders containing printed fan mail to Her Interactive, potentially part of a write-in contest. The narratives were typed in the same font, with not signatures or variance in writing; some selected fan letters were excerpted and printed on Her Interactive stationery, possibly to be included with internal marketing materials. Only one letter is dated (2010) but the majority mention many Nancy Drew titles published during the 2000s and may all be from around 2010.

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

Box 3
Folder 6  Printed fan mail to Her Interactive, n.d. [c. 2010]
Folder 7  Printed fan mail to Her Interactive, n.d. [c. 2010]
Folder 8  Printed fan mail to Her Interactive, n.d. [c. 2010]
Folder 9  Printed fan mail to Her Interactive, n.d. [c. 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