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News & Views

Your family's story can make (oral) history

A new national project encourages you to get nosy with your family. The story of the woman who raised your mom or how your dad grew up in a small town could end up at the Library of Congress' American Folklife Center in Washington, D.C. The idea to record everyday Americans' oral histories is the brainchild of radio documentarian Dave Isay's non-profit StoryCorps project (storycorps.net), which plans to set up recording booths around the country starting later this year. The first opened last year at New York's Grand Central Station; one is planned for Chicago this fall. How it works: You interview a family member or friend about his or her experiences (cost: \$10 an interview). Eventually, you'll be able to order a recording kit online. One entry: Egyptian-born Seoud Matta performed an Egyptian pop song with son Adam. The sessions inspire powerful emotions, Isay says: "People start to cry when the mike goes on. They feel so honored people actually want to listen." He hopes to collect 250,000 stories by 2014: "StoryCorps will make sure our nation's voices are never lost."

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New life for old phones

Old phones are getting a lot of attention, largely because of ever-upgrading cellphone technology and new incentives to unplug home phones for good in exchange for cell portability. Here are some ways to recycle the estimated 200 million-plus old phones lying around America:

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Check with corporate or local electronic recycling programs. For info, go to eiae.org; call the Arlington, Va.-based Electronics Industries Alliance at 703-907-7500; or go to wirelessrecycling.com (800-293-3601).

Cellphone donations help fund good causes, like victims of domestic violence (wirelessfoundation.org, 202-785-0081), research (recycleforbreastcancer.com, 925-735-7203), and the Sierra Club (via the office store Staples). Or go to wirelesscharity.com (877-257-2346).

Plug-ins are in-demand as retro home accessories.
First stop: thrift stores.

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Young, rich & famous

Your kids aren't all that different.

America's youth may take some cues from their rich and famous peers, but instead of worrying, adults should see the benefits, says Cecily von Ziegesar, 31, whose popular "Gossip Girl" novels follow a group of well-off Manhattan teens. For one thing, she says, young people's high profile in our society may make them feel less alienated than past generations. "Teens have been empowered by the explosion of media geared toward them," she says. We spoke with her:

"Celebrity isn't just for famous people anymore," says Cecily von Ziegesar, author of a teen book series.

Do you worry that young people aren't serious-minded today?

It's actually sort of liberating to admit you'd rather buy a new pair of shoes than take out the recycling.

So society expects too much from them. Does seeing rich kids struggle teach other kids that money doesn't buy happiness?

Most know that already -- teens are more savvy -- but it still doesn't keep them from wanting those new shoes!

What could young people possibly have in common with, say, Paris and Nicky?

Problems with their parents ... whether the [boy] they kissed last night really likes them or not ...

... or if it was caught on video. What is the impact of the media scrutiny of the young?
Celebrity isn't just for famous people anymore. There's a chance every kid out there is thinking, "Hey! Maybe one day I'll be on TV."

Does that change how teens deal with peer pressure, sex and love?

Money changes the setting, the costumes ... not the behavior.

Contributing: Brenda Biondo, Vyvyan Lynn, Jenna Schnuer

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