

Telling Their Stories: Oral History Archives Project—

now in its 7th year—is an award-winning website housing professional-style interviews with elders who witnessed key events of the 20th century. High School students at the Urban School of San Francisco conduct video-taped

interviews at the homes of Bay Area residents. Students research and learn interview techniques, develop

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sophisticated questions, conduct conversational style interviews, and then transcribe each 2+ hour interview to produce full-text and full motion video content available to teachers and students around the world. Current topics include interviews with survivors of the Holocaust, liberators and witnesses of the Nazi concentration camps, and Japanese Americans interned during World War II.

The Project

The student created website—www.tellingstories.org—will soon contain over 35 interviews, each available in full text and video. The website is designed for users to “read, watch, and listen” to interviews, thus strengthening the accessibility and impact of each story. Most interviews are conducted at the homes of each elder, although some have been filmed at the school or at nearby community centers. A small mobile studio containing professional digital video equipment is quickly set-up at each location. After the interview, students produce the hundreds of short movie clips and lengthy transcriptions using their laptop computers. A team of volunteer parents then proof each interview assuring accurate transcriptions. The interviews, once complete, are published on Urban School’s oral history website—www.tellingstories.org. And finally, DVD’s are created and distributed free of charge to the families of the elders.

The School

Urban School of San Francisco—an independent 9-12th grade school in San Francisco’s historic Haight-Ashbury district—seeks to ignite a passion for learning, inspiring students to become self-motivated, enthusiastic participants in their education and active citizens in their communities. The school's core values emphasize learning as a process of

discovery, the use of city and Bay Area resources to extend learning beyond the classroom, mutual respect between students and teachers, and a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. Urban students are prepared for college and beyond through a mastery of subject matter and academic skills. The most enduring aspect of an Urban education is the ability for students to become self-motivated, enthusiastic participants in their education.

The Class

Telling Their Stories: Oral History Archives Project is an elective history course at the Urban School. Students in grades 10-12 study background history of each year’s topic. Teams of 3 students research each historical topic, prepare interview questions, conduct the actual interview, and work collaboratively to complete each project.

The Purpose

Summer Educator’s Workshop

Telling Their Stories: Producing Web-Based Digital Video Oral Histories

July 27-31, 2008

See www.tellingstories.org/workshop/cit.html



Telling Their Stories is designed to serve as a model for schools across the nation. Modern technology tools are used to document the personal stories of eyewitnesses and to then make these interviews available to other students and teachers throughout the world. The website demonstrates that students can directly contribute to the global learning community by conducting and publishing oral histories documenting racial, religious and ethnic discrimination. The entire process directly challenges students and teachers to personally confront issues of bias and the impact of discrimination.



Professionals

Howard Levin, Urban School's Director of Technology, taught history for 10 years prior to joining Urban in 1999. Howard was an interviewer for the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History program, a Steven Spielberg funded project that interviewed thousands of survivors throughout the world. Howard combines his oral history experience with technical knowledge to help assure a successful final project. Howard also leads an annual week-long workshop for educators from around the country who want to learn to apply the techniques of **Telling Their Stories** to their own schools. Howard attends all interviews and is the primary contact for the class.

Zackaria Gaines is Urban's 2007-08 Teaching Fellow. He supports the course with a new emphasis on student writing.

Deborah Dent-Samake taught the course for the first 5 years, teaming with Howard throughout. She helped develop both the content and methodologies used in the class. Deborah is currently pursuing a degree in Social Work with an emphasis on using storytelling for therapy.

Contact Information

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Recognition and Awards

Howard will present *An Approach to the Use of Oral Testimonies* at the Holocaust Forum, sponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, April, 2008

Howard, Deborah, Dan Matz, Erin Wallace ('09) and Zach Williams ('07) presented *The Digital Video Generation: Practicality and Efficacy of Student Produced Oral Histories* at the 2007 Oral History Association Annual Meeting, Oakland, October, 2007.

Howard led a full-day workshop, *Telling Their Stories: Producing Web-based Digital Video Interviews* at the 2007 Oral History Association Annual Meeting, Oakland, October, 2007.

Howard delivered an academic paper about **Telling Their Stories** as presented at the International Oral History Association's world conference in Sydney, Australia, June 2006.

The World Conference on Educational Multimedia (Ed-Media) bestowed an Outstanding Poster Award for a display about **Telling Their Stories**, Montreal, Canada, June 2005.

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) bestowed a Leading Edge Award for **Telling Their Stories**, Montreal, Canada, March 2004.

Making History Come Alive: Students Interview Holocaust Survivors on Camera and Publish Their Stories on the Web, published in Learning and Leading with Technology, November 2003.



www.tellingstories.org

