

Once upon a time...

Once upon a time, there was a husband and wife who loved children's books so much that they read them profusely though they had no children of their own. They read and they read and they read, and then one day they found themselves with three little ones whose interest in books was in perilous danger of waning. The parents, Dustin and Kylee Smith, decided that the little ones would enjoy the experience of reading much more if it included wonderful adventures related to the books of interest.

So the Smiths took their children on a magical treasure hunt in their backyard after reading "How I Became a Pirate," and the children were thoroughly enchanted. Kylee was charmed that she and her husband had discovered "a very meaningful way of helping books come alive" for their children.

"They loved the activities, and we were thrilled that TV was losing its hypnotic allure for them," said Kylee. "The combination of book and activity expanded their comprehension of the books, broadened their imagination on the subjects and inspired them to love reading."

Soon, the Smiths began to include activities in a land far away from their home. "We were surprised at all that Phoenix had to offer, despite having lived here most of our lives," she said. And when friends began to seek their input on book recommendations, for the Smiths were reading an astounding 30-plus children's books every week, they decided to share their ideas about book-activity combinations – "Book|Blasts" – with the community.

They didn't live happily ever after, but the concept of OnceUponAGoodTime.com, the Smiths' budding Internet business, was thus born. The Web site is a free resource for parents that pairs books with activities and events around the Valley or within the home and can include anything from trips to museums and shows to writing stories in the living room.

"We read and keep a large list of great children's books. We also research and keep a large list of events, activities and fun businesses in the Phoenix area. We consider holidays, weather and the timing of events and try to make a great match in each Book|Blast," said Kylee. "We do our best to balance the number of chapter books and picture books that we review as well as the number of free events versus activities that cost money."

In addition to paired book activities, the site offers access to all prior Book|Blasts, a community discussion forum and an e-mail subscription to weekly Book|Blasts (without the disclosure of personal information).

zoo bestsellers list, Newbery and Caldecott Award winners and recommendations from their friends. "We've also been known to give lesser-known titles a shot by grabbing random books off the shelf at the library or Barnes and Noble to see whether they'll make the cut," said Kylee. "The books that make it on the site are just a fraction of those we consider. We just hope we can keep doing this long enough to make a dent in the list of books we'd love to share with everyone."

Prior to building their Web site, Kylee worked for Disneyland and later as an event coordinator for nonprofit organizations, and Dustin has an MBA in entertainment management with a focus



The Smiths hope to partner with companies featured on the site in the future so they can offer incentives to families who participate. "As we grow, we hope to add additional features that will help parents take back family time and encourage literacy," said the business owner. Currently, the site has a small subscription base primarily composed of family and friends, but the Smiths are excited by the response they've received in the last few months. "We are in our second year of writing Book|Blasts. After the first year of experimenting with the concept, we updated and improved our site in preparation for a public launch early this year."

The Smiths select the books they feature on OnceUponAGoodTime.com from the New York Times bestsellers list, the Ama-

zon bestsellers list, Newbery and Caldecott Award winners and recommendations from their friends. "We've also been known to give lesser-known titles a shot by grabbing random books off the shelf at the library or Barnes and Noble to see whether they'll make the cut," said Kylee. "The books that make it on the site are just a fraction of those we consider. We just hope we can keep doing this long enough to make a dent in the list of books we'd love to share with everyone."

"We hope people will find our site useful and fun," said Kylee. "We'd love to help a kid who has no motivation to read to see the magic of books. We hope we can help a parent with little drive to read to their child to see the value of cuddling together to laugh at a great story. We want to bring some sanity to the mom whose children constantly complain that they are bored! If we can pull the bookworm out in your athlete and the adventurer out in your scholar, we'll know we're doing our job."

For more information, visit www.once-uponagoodtime.com or e-mail the owners at bookblast@onceuponagoodtime.com.