

Family F.Y.I.

Culture on and off the Couch

Watch *The Secret Garden* and then see what's blooming at Descanso Gardens in La Cañada. Enjoy *Fly Away Home* and try your hand at birding at the Sepulveda Basin. Or maybe sit down with *Seabiscuit* and venture off to the Santa Anita Racetrack tram tour.

These pairings of family films and accompanying adventures are just a few examples of what you'll find when you log onto the new Web site, www.kidsoffthecouch.com. The brainchild of co-founders and West L.A. moms Sarah Bowman and Diane Phillips Shakin, Kidsoffthecouch.com is a free weekly online newsletter for parents offering fresh ideas to get kids excited about film, culture and family time.

"It's difficult for families to find meaningful time together during busy weekends," says Bowman. "Think of us as your family's cultural filter. We vet the films and adventures and offer advice based on what worked with our kids." Shakin adds, "We've done the planning for you. It's like a mini-vacation, without leaving town."

The two women came up with the idea while running a mother-daughter book club with their 10-year-old girls. After reading the E.L. Konigsburg classic *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, Bowman recalls wanting to jump on a plane to visit the Met,

where the story is set.

"Instead, we went to the Getty, just 10 minutes from our house," Shakin recalls. "The girls and our then 7-year-old boys had the time of their lives, re-creating antics of the characters in the book. The notion of the Web site was born that day."

Realizing that watching movies provided a great opportunity for families to spend time together, they switched gears and keyed their weekend adventures off films (they still promote books on the site). Two years later, the pair work full time providing content for the site and growing the business. Shakin says, "We've stumbled on a great formula, and with our Web site, we figured out a way to create quality family time and to sneak in bite-sized bits of culture."

The end result is a multidimensional treat for the entire family. The site is a delight to visit – it's easy to use and navigate, and each adventure comes to life with the help of the whimsical drawings by illustrator Laura Cornell (known for her work in Jamie Lee Curtis' books). And the ideas are infused with humor, insight and practical advice offered by seasoned mothers and adventurers, Bowman and Shakin.

Then discover, as these two moms did, that sometimes you have to get on the couch with your kids to get them off it again.

– Romi Lassally

