



Union-Tribune / RONI GALGANO

Bill and Carol Baras: *The Story Lady and her husband raise funds with new thrift store.*

Carol (Foremost) Baras

The Story Lady ¹⁴⁹ **still brings smiles via the telephone**

By **SANDI DOLBEE**
Religion & Ethics Editor

Carol Baras was having a busy day. When she saw the little grocery store, she figured she could dash in, get her shopping done and be on her way.

But she did not figure on the 4-year-old boy who was sitting on the curb, "crying his heart out."

She asked him why he was crying.

" 'My daddy won't let me go into the store . . . because I'm a bad boy.' "

This was a challenge that the woman who made her living in self-improvement seminars could not pass up.

"Well, you know, you're really lucky to be out here, sitting in the sunshine and seeing the cars go by," she told the boy.

He stopped crying and began picking out cars. A green one. A truck. A few moments later, he was smiling and she was heading into the store.

That encounter back in 1978 gave her an idea that is still moving her life.

Baras, with the help of some friends, started a story telephone service for children that same year. By calling 291-KIDS, youngsters each day can hear a 90-second tale from "The Story Lady," who discusses everything from the miracle of where bread and butter come from to the power of a smile.

The Story Lady has the same 90 stories she started with — all written by a Phoenix man she met through Hypnos Morpheus, a self-hypnosis, self-help program founded by Baras and her husband, Bill.

Over the years, the story service went on a kind of automatic pilot. Then, a few months ago, she and her husband decided they really needed to "do something with the project."

She thought it would be nice to install toll-free lines throughout the county. She also thought it would be nice to go national with it. Then she and Bill thought about how they might pay for such ventures.

A story in itself

And this is why most days find Carol Baras behind the counter at a new Hillcrest thrift store. Bill Baras usually is not far away, hauling cargo in his pickup truck or helping out with the cash register.

The store, at 1455 University Ave., is called "Baras Foundation," named after the nonprofit corporation set up to fund 291-KIDS. Only three months old, Baras says the 10,000-square-foot shop already is a testimony to people's generosity. Its stock is all donated.

"Look at the letters," says the 63-year-old mother of three and grandmother of one, her hands fanning a stack of mail to "The Story Lady."

"If I didn't think it was making a difference, I wouldn't keep doing it."

A young woman from Lemon Grove writes that she started calling 291-KIDS when she was in grade school. She now is a sophomore in college. "I have a brother who is 14 and when he gets really depressed, I even catch him on the phone listening to you," she confesses.

A 14-year-old girl from University City writes: "You help keep things optimistic and in perspective for me."

A 17-year-old La Jolla student confides his problems in a lengthy letter and then adds, "I always call 291-KIDS and it makes me feel a whole lot better."

Kids today have few people they can turn to for encouragement, says Baras, relaxing in the front room of her spacious brick-and-wood home overlooking Mission Valley.

"I'm not saying parents are bad," she adds. "They are trying their best. They are all working and there just isn't any time left over for the kids."

Her stories are snapshot support groups, cajoling young people to look on the bright side. In one, she tells children that if Dad is being a grump today, don't join him. "Just pat him on the hand and tell him you love him."

PEOPLE

WHO

CARE:

Carol Baras