

Michele Spitz

A Woman of Her Word

By Noah Griffin

Michele Spitz's business card reads: "Woman of Her Word." As her story unfolds you will understand why.

The bubbly, enthusiastic but singularly focused youngest of three, Michele Spitz found her calling midway through life. She's a native San Franciscan, whose parents were bi-continental. Her father was born in Los Angeles, and her mother was born in England. Her father came from a family history rooted in classical music, and her mother from a family history rooted in stage theater and cinema. Her parents met and married in Los Angeles before winding their way to the city by the bay.

Spitz though Jewish, like Dianne Feinstein, attended Convent of the Sacred Heart High School. She greatly valued the education that she received, however she jokingly admits that she made peace with mandatory weekly mass attendance by becoming a full time singer in the church choir. The Mass experience then became more of an artistic expression rather than a religious one. Upon graduation, Spitz spent a year at USC before transferring up to SF State where she graduated with a degree in Broadcasting.

Her father was a successful publisher having collaborated with his father in expanding their family owned magazine, *Guest Informant* which originally expanded from Los Angeles to San Francisco, only to eventually be published throughout 42 cities. Within the pages of this annual, luxury hardback publication, the



reader was informed of events, plays, shopping, restaurants, night clubs and tourist attractions in the vicinity of each city. Michele's parents were generous with their time and philanthropy towards various individuals and causes, and instilled the same timeless values in their children to carry out their legacy of giving back. Michele has continued to serve multiple communities over the past many years. Her desired goal was to make the cultural and performing arts world accessible to, and inclusive of all audiences. These audiences consisted of individuals ranging from veterans, seniors, children, disabled and undeserved communities. More specifically, individuals with low vision or blindness, and individuals who are hard of hearing or deaf are too often excluded from audience participation. Spitz first began to fill the gap by donating large groups of tickets to be set aside for audience members who otherwise may not have made their way to an event. She then also afforded individuals with various disabilities to participate

in multiple performing arts classes and venues. This enabled individuals to express themselves freely (on and off) the stage, as well as (in front of and behind) the camera. Ultimately, Michele was able to actually make an art form accessible herself, by virtue of lending her voice to narrate supplementary audio tracks, called "Audio Description" that complement film and television programming. These specific audio tracks which are typically heard via a (theater provided headset) allow for low vision and blind audiences to experience media via the cinematic experience. Television, video on demand and DVD/BluRay rental or purchases can be experienced similarly in the privacy of one's home via (open audio description, minus a headset.)

After 25 years of a marketing career in the Real Estate industry, she departed from this previous path to embark upon her new journey returning to the voiceover industry. This led to a new full time career providing audio description for the film industry, inclusive of also selectively offering a number of grants annually to sponsor the accessibility deliverable assets. This was the perfect marriage of her philanthropy and voiceover talent. Her first venture was underwriting and narrating the audio description asset for a full-length documentary film titled "Driving Blind."

A true-life story of two brothers who potentially may lose their vision due to a degenerative eye disease from birth. They decide to take a sight-seeing cross country trip to

experience all they could, while they still could. This endeavor of making this film accessible became a turning point in Spitz's life. She clearly found her calling!

She has since made it a one-woman campaign to raise awareness and open the door of accessibility to an entire audience who are too often left unconsidered. Although too modest to share all of her many credits, a perusal of her IMDb bio reveals the numerous projects Spitz is credited with numbering 50 film projects, consisting of commercial cinematic releases, as well as short and full-length independent

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documentaries. Of the more recently released films they include: "The Beatles: Eight Days A Week," "Itzhak" and "Dealt," which we will return to later. She has also video described "The Great Muppet Caper" for Disney Cable.

From the years 2014 to 2017, Michele is also credited with voicing the audio description for Superfest: SF International Disability Film Festival and for ReelAbilities; New York International Disability Film Festival from 2015 to 2018.

Her online bio additionally includes the causes she supports which include underwriting various programs. She is a supporter of Actors for Autism, Deaf West Theater, SFJAZZ, Axis Dance, JCCSF Arts & Ideas, and Osher Marin JCC Senior Excursions. Michele also supports Lighthouse for the Blind, Helen Keller Services for the Blind, That Man May See and Guide Dogs for the Blind.

This doesn't begin to cover the children's programming, museums, industrial and fundraising videos, audio manuals and public service announcements that she has also voiced. Michele has also been a film awards presenter and fundraising emcee for select events.

Spitz credits her most rewarding achievement as elevating consciousness, particularly among independent filmmakers where the accessibility deliverable assets are not always affordable, and therefore not often implemented. Michele conducts film audience accessibility panels to educate filmmakers, distributors, post production staff and cinema owners. Her most recent panel took place at the 55th New York Film Festival sponsored by HBO Free Talks.

Awareness remains a challenge even for those with visual impairment who are often not readily informed by the public of the multiple options to utilize audio description within the cultural and performing arts experiences. To further raise the awareness among future media makers, Spitz partnered with the British Academy of Film and Television Arts to provide college scholarships for two graduate film student's with disabilities.

Spitz's most recent success debuted at the Mill Valley Film Festival. "Dealt" is a movie that centers on

the life of the internationally known, world renowned card mechanic, Richard Turner who is completely blind. Michele produced and narrated the audio description for this film and participated on the Q&A film festival screening panel, along with the producer and Richard Turner. The theater was equipped with 60 infrared audio description headsets, in which all were put to use in this sold out 500 seat member screening.

Michele continues to donate her voice to narrate the quarterly audio newsletters for Guide Dogs for the Blind for the past four years. She pays keen attention to the ongoing trends in progress in the accessibility industry, and takes pride in the numbers of performing arts venues, attractions, museums, destinations, cinemas that implement accessibility tools. Technology development is now expanding in providing smart phone apps that sync with various venues to allow for audience integration and inclusion for both the deaf and blind communities. The FCC July 2018 ruling mandates that all cinemas be equipped with accessible viewing capabilities. Michele looks forward to a day when we can all share the same viewing experience in the same physical space, as one audience.

To have found her calling in middle age is a true blessing. One can't come away from meeting Michele Spitz and but be enthused and inspired by what she does and the joy it gives her, but more importantly the service it provides to others. That's why you can truly say she is a "Woman of Her Word."

To learn more about Michele's endeavors and to experience her voiceover work, please visit: www.womanofherword.com