

Remembering Charles J. Lipow

By Leon Silverman

Our industry lost an unsung hero on 11 November 2015. Charles J. Lipow was one of those larger-than-life industry figures, even if his own impact was known to only a few. He was the man behind the scenes of those who worked behind the scenes. His role as a “PR guy” beginning in the 1970s was pretty much a cover for his real contributions that served to directly influence many of the transformative developments in camera and post-production over the past 40 years.

He played an almost Forrest Gump-like, right-time, right-place role at the intersection of some of our industry’s most important transitions. He helped launch the SteadiCam and many developments in camera when he served Cinema Products and its founder Ed DiGuilio, one of Charles’s most dear and long-time friends. Charles was instrumental in the adoption of electronic nonlinear editing for film and modern post-production workflow techniques in the early 1980s by virtue of his role introducing technologies such as the Montage Picture Processor, Lucasfilm’s EditDroid, and Pacific Video’s (later to become LaserPacific’s) Electronic Laboratory.



The two-person Charles J. Lipow, Inc., firm that he ran with his beloved wife and love of his life, Ruhama, became the go-to public relations and ad agency of those who were looking to drive innovation. His company’s self-

described mission was “dedicated to the creation and dissemination of technical information and promotional materials, including industry-oriented publications for companies that design, develop, and manufacture production and post production systems for the television and motion picture industries.”

To say that Charles was a forceful presence does not do justice to encountering him for the first or any time for that matter. Piercing eyes, a proud shock of big, white hair, and a challenging way allowed him to measure you and you to measure yourself in his intellectually commanding and, I dare say, sometimes intimidating presence. Charles played chess. He played it even when he was not in front of a board. He played it in life, where every move had a reason and was thought through.

Charles entered my life in the early 1980s when I was still in my 20s, a young sales and marketing executive at Pacific Video, as we were about to launch the Electronic Laboratory. I thought I was hiring the go-to public relations and advertising

firm—Charles J. Lipow, Inc.—although, as it turned out, I had hired a life coach, a surrogate father, a Socratic inquisitor, and a mentor. There was no middle ground with Charles. No easy conversation. No easy way. He would ask you questions to make you think. He would ask you questions to make sure you were firm in your beliefs. He loved to pull your leg. He told parables, jokes, and life lessons invoking a foil, antagonist or protagonist, depending on the occasion, named “Morris.” I never knew who Morris was and why he was so often invoked to teach these lessons, but I dare not have asked. Charles Lipow was a human boot camp—determined to make a man or, at the very least, an executive out of me. And he would command me as if *he* had hired *me*. And as it turned out, what he told me would change my life and career forever.

Charles felt strongly that in order to be successful in the motion picture and television technology industry, one must become active in the community. He ordered me to join SMPTE. Yes. He ordered me! He made sure I got on committees. He prodded me to run for Local Section Manager. He insisted that I help organize SMPTE educational events and programs.

And for me, joining SMPTE led to industry organization “volunteritis” that helped me to become part of the technology community as a peer and not some video facility sales guy—although I was not an engineer. Through SMPTE and industry

organizations, I met so many colleagues who would become friends, who inspired and influenced me, and who exposed me to new ideas that allowed me to develop my own technology and innovation vision.

And to Charles, his own membership, participation, and acknowledgment from within SMPTE were some of his proudest career achievements. Charles was active throughout his career in SMPTE, especially in conferences and the public relations committee. He was a Governor-at-Large and felt so truly honored when he was elevated to an SMPTE Fellow. As a nonengineer, Charles was so proud that he could help the technology community by celebrating new developments and accomplishments and by helping the industry understand

the impact and the importance of the transition it was making from the 100-year-old tradition of cinema and film to the emerging digital age that Charles helped to create.

There are so many who have helped to build this amazing industry in which we are so honored to serve. There are so many names and people we can point to that have been instrumental in ushering in this new era of technological impact and change. But there is another name that deserves to be acknowledged, remembered, and celebrated. It is not just that Charles J. Lipow was important in my own life and career. He was also a force (because he *was* forceful) in so many others' lives and careers. Charles's professional accomplishments live on today in so many

aspects of modern industry workflow and innovation in production and post-production. And while his industry contributions are reason enough to make sure that Charles is not an unsung hero, it is equally important to celebrate Charles's role in the proud tradition of industry service and mentorship. As SMPTE celebrates its centennial, it is incredible to think of 100 years of the personal generosity that helps each generation see the value of SMPTE through the guidance of the previous generation.

It is through the dedication and selflessness of people like Charles that we continue the proud tradition of our society as we prepare it for its next 100 years. Please join me in celebrating the life, accomplishments, and lessons of Charles J. Lipow.

Les Free

SMPTE Life Fellow and Australian television pioneer Les Free, has passed away at the age of 90.

Free was instrumental in bringing television to Australia, starting work as the assistant chief engineer at TCN Channel 9 in Sydney prior to the station going on air on 16 September 1956. He became chief engineer in 1965 after the original chief engineer died.

After more than a decade as assistant chief engineer and then a

decade as chief engineer, Free was promoted to the head of research and development for Publishing and Broadcasting at its then Park Street headquarters in 1976 where he remained until his retirement in 1990.

Free oversaw the introduction of television to Australia and was also instrumental in bringing color television to the country. Working with government regulators, principally the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, and engineers from

television stations across Australia, he and his industry colleagues brought color television to every station in the country on the same day on 1 March 1975, which was known as C-day.

Free is survived by four sons, Jonathan, Derek, Andrew and Michael; one daughter, Miranda; and nine grandchildren, Samuel, Laura, Emma, Katelyn, Luke, Jasper, Vincent, Naomi and Alex.

(Source: *Big News Network*)

