**In Honor of a Museum Giant**

Michael Spock, who died on December 7, 2018 at age 85, changed museums world over and forever. Having become the director of the Boston Children’s Museum in 1962 at age 29 and remaining for 23 years. He was the dyslexic son of the famous pediatrician, Ben Spock, which made his school difficulties visible to many. Michael held the first junior membership of the Museum of Modern Art because he attended so often, having stumbled on how he learned best by having real objects around. Because of his school experiences, Michael remained interested in theories of progressive education for children, especially those struggling in regular school. These became the foundational theories of the Boston Children’s Museum.

Spock turned the venerable but staid Boston Children’s Museum into a world model of hands-on learning for children when on their own, in groups, or together with their parents or caregivers. His specialty was narrative and additive content rather than episodic experiences. The Boston Museum leaned toward exhibitions of cultural and social problems. The staff piloted the use of real collections within a mix of reproductions and manufactured experiences. The museum broadened its reach with school kits, afterschool activities and teacher training.

Mike had a deep commitment to an inclusionary philosophy that built an internal staff commune. Those fortunate enough to be in the ensemble learned on the job, were encouraged to take risks, trusted and took care of each other, grew self-assured under his guidance and were encouraged not only to trust their moral compasses, but to see that confidence as a contribution to the mission of the museum. Anyone uttering “It does not feel like us!” could sink a seemingly good idea. Many of his team had never thought of themselves as ordained to be successful and were surprised when their progress was supported by the others. It was a supportive culture with Michael as the head cheerleader.

Spock’s children’s museum model was emulated hundreds of times all over the world but often without consideration to the original deep philosophical aspirations and constant try-outs to get it right. Spock’s team was credited as a founder of the team approach to the exhibition design movement. The staff did not have traditional museum professional names nor traditional responsibilities. He would say that his goal was to create “Landmark Experiences” and “Aha moments” and the museums he worked on (having gone to the Field Museum from 1986 to 1995) created both. The inclusion of children’s spaces, and exhibition interactivity embedded in adult museums everywhere owe much to the work Michael facilitated.

Michael Spock, with all his seemingly shy “aw shucks” presentation, was committed to bold social action, museum politics, design excellence, architectural innovation and precise fiscal supervision. What was informal and welcoming was also always excellently but consensually managed.

People all over the current American museum landscape owe their career beginnings to Michael Spock’s generous support and ongoing kindness. His legacy has been played forward in so many places that the experiments he oversaw now seem embedded in the very definition of museums.