

Cameraman Fritz Spiess, 73

BY ART CHAMBERLAIN
STAFF REPORTER

Fritz Spiess was the master of an unusual art form — the Canadian TV commercial.

Mr. Spiess, called the dean of Canadian cinematographers by his peers, died Thursday of leukemia at age 73.

During a career that spanned five decades, he shot 3,000 commercials for everything; from Swift's Premium Ham, his first effort, to a series on AIDS prevention in the late 1980s.

Mr. Spiess won many national and international awards, including two at the Cannes film festival, his wife Gunild said Saturday.

In 1979 the Canadian Television Commercials Awards honoured him by creating the Fritz Spiess award for an individual "who has displayed continuing, consistent dedication to excellence in the art of the television commercial."

"Fritz always had time to lend a hand or a few words of advice to a young trainee, or assistant struggling to learn the ropes," said Don Angus, editor of CSC News, the Canadian Society of Cinematographers' newsletter.

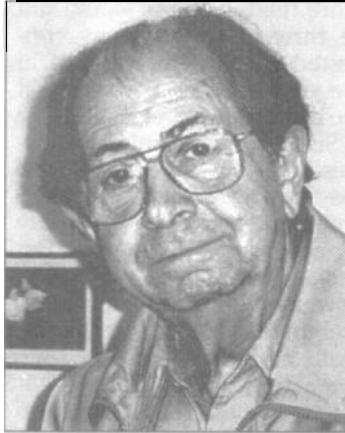
Mr. Spiess was born in Germany in 1925 into a family of photographers and at age 6 received his own box camera.

"I saw the original silent Ben Hur at Sunday school in the early 1930s and it made a lasting impression because of the fast action and the constantly moving camera." Mr. Spiess said in a 1988 interview.

He attended the St. Thomas Choir School in Leipzig; and at age 16 shot his first film about the school, because it was being threatened by the Nazis.

After World War II he trained as a still photographer and had a studio in Heidelberg.

"We came to Canada in 1951 because we wanted to see the world and Canada was the first country to open its door to German immigrants." Gunild said. "Then, we saw Georgian Bay and fell in love"



MR. SPIESS

bought property in the Key River area and built a cottage.

Mr. Spiess first worked in Canada as a still photographer but got his break into film in 1954 when he volunteered to shoot a movie about children with cerebral palsy. Staff at the film-processing company were so impressed with the work that he was offered a job.

For the next 37 years he worked as a cameraman and director of photography for several companies until he retired in 1991 from Rawi-Sherman Films Inc.

Mr. Spiess criss-crossed Canada to produce the revolutionary 360 degree movie shown at the Telephone Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal.

But he was never tempted to switch to movies, his wife said. "He was fascinated by trying to excel in just 30 seconds."

In the late 1960s, shooting a commercial for Salada Tea, he introduced diffused, directional lighting that had only been used by still photographers before. The work was so successful many advertisers came calling to get the same effect for their shots.

A private burial service was held Saturday. A memorial service is planned for Sunday, April 19 at 4 p.m. at McRann & Malone Commercial Studios, 388 Carlaw Ave., Suite 205

As well as his wife, Mr. Spiess leaves daughters Lorraine Spiess and Veronica