

THE VOICE

When Steve Kamer '81 talks, people listen.

There is really no way to escape the appealing, dulcet tones of Steve Kamer's '81 voice. He was heard during the Sochi Winter Olympics.

His voice graces the trailer of the Oscar-winning film *Argo*. It is he who politely yet firmly tells you to "stand clear of the closing doors" on the New York/New Jersey PATH Train. Kamer's was the voice you heard before seeing Geraldo Rivera, Phil Donahue, Martha Stewart, and Regis Philbin. He's urged you to buy your entertainment center at Circuit City, lean back in a La-Z-Boy, and sprinkle your stinky feet with Gold Bond Powder – as well as advised you on hundreds of other purchases that will make your life more deeply satisfying. And, perhaps most notably, Kamer is the one who reads the copy for the Deborah Norville-helmed show, *Inside Edition*.

Kamer's career as a voice actor comes as little surprise to his mother, Phyllis. As soon as her son could walk and talk, she recalls, he was following her around the house interviewing her with a Coke bottle, hairbrush, or anything else that resembled a microphone. And when he wasn't working on his voice, he was studying the voices of others.

"I was a fan of television since I was in the single digits," Kamer recalls. "But it was the game shows that intrigued me." It wasn't long before Kamer began to beg his parents to take him to see *To Tell the Truth*, *The \$10,000 Pyramid*, *What's My Line?* and other shows that taped in New York City. It was official, the boy was smitten with broadcasting.

As a student at Lawrenceville, Kamer was naturally a fixture at WLSR, the School's two-watt radio station, then housed in the basement of Old Lower. More surprising is that at that

time he was *also* a deejay at two Trenton commercial stations, WPST and WTTM, working weekends at the not-so-coveted midnight-to-6 a.m. shift.

"But there the phones lit up!" Kamer says, still beaming at the memory. "People were listening!"

After getting his degree at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School, he settled in to a career at New York's WNSR. It was steady work, and not unpleasant, but it wasn't where Kamer wanted his career to end up. So when he was not on the air, he pursued work as a voice actor.

"The transition from being a disc jockey to a voice actor is one that many deejays want to make," he explains. "But it's a transition that is difficult to make. People learn habits as a disc jockey that are not compatible with being a voice actor. Clients don't want 'an announcer,' a male with that deep, stentorian voice. They want voice actors who are trained in acting."

Kamer worked at WNSR (which later became MIX105) for nine years, getting the occasional voiceover on the side, until 1994 when NBC hired him to be the voice of *The Today Show*, with Bryant Gumbel and Katie Couric. That job, steady and lucrative, allowed him to leave radio behind forever.

Back in the 1990s, and for years thereafter, Kamer was required to do his voice work in network studios, but as technology and telecommunications improved, the trips across the Hudson from his home in New Jersey were no longer required. These days, Kamer does all of his work from a home studio – and there is *a lot* of work, usually 100 scripts a day, necessitating a workday that often begins at 8 a.m. and ends at midnight. Sometimes

he is directed by phone by the client as he records. Far more often, however, he directs himself, sending his work out as an MP3 or WAVE file.

Over the years Kamer has developed a reputation not only for his polished delivery, but also for his quick turnaround time. "So if a TV station in L.A. needs to put a promotional announcement on the air within the hour, I can do that," he says.

He even has a portable studio so he can record while on vacation. Voice acting is a very lucrative vocation, Kamer notes, but one that comes with "golden handcuffs." Fortunately he loves the work enough to not mind the hours.

That is especially true with announcing a show like *Inside Edition* – one that allows him to joyously revisit the good old bad habits of his radio days.

"I've been Deborah Norville's announcer for 18 years. Before I got there, it seemed like they had a new announcer for that show every year. They couldn't settle on what they wanted. I started in 1997 and have kept the job ever since.

"I do everything on that show that I can't do on any other job," says Kamer with a laugh. "It's classic announcer style. At the beginning of the show there might be 10 different stories that are going to be on that episode. It's my responsibility to shift gears when I tease each story so each one sounds different."

Kamer provides a demonstration. Turning the schmaltz dial up to 11, he goes to work.

"*Inside Edition* is backstage at the Super Bowl with all the action and activity you didn't see anywhere else!" Then, in the blink of an eye, that wonderful voice slips into slow

and somber mode: "Plus, the tragic death of Philip Seymour Hoffman and how he overdosed on heroin." Then, in another blink, his voice is joyful, bordering on delirious: "And the latest spring fashions!"

It all works beautifully. The power of that

voice, whether you want it to or not, gets you swept up in the moment. Suddenly you can't help but wonder how posterity will remember Philip Seymour Hoffman. Or exactly how high hemlines might creep up next spring. Or how you'd really like to sit in a La-Z-Boy to bet-

ter prop up your formerly stinky feet while watching that TV you bought at Circuit City. After you turn it on, you won't have to search too long to come across more of Steve Kamer's persuasive pitches. And yes, they will all worm their way into your brain.



▲ Steve Kamer and his very first interview subject.

Photograph by Jordan Hollender