

PublicPersona

GET TO KNOW COLORADO'S TOP PERSONALITIES

AN *Italian-Chinese* AMERICAN AND SMOKY HILL GRADUATE'S JOURNEY FROM *anthropologist* TO *cable TV exec* TO BUSY *mother* AND FULL-TIME *philanthropist*



PHOTO: JASON GRUBB

THE ESSENTIALS

NAME & AGE: MICHELLE SIE WHITTEN, 42

FAMILY: MARRIED TO TOM WHITTEN, A CHINESE CONTEMPORARY ART EXPERT AND CONSULTANT, FOR 10 YEARS—PLUS TWO CHILDREN, A BRILLIANT 6-YEAR-OLD, SOPHIA, WHO HAPPENS TO HAVE DOWN SYNDROME, AND A PRECOCIOUS, HANDSOME 3-YEAR-OLD, PATRICK

EDUCATION: SMOKY HILL HIGH SCHOOL, B.A. FROM TUFTS, M.A. FROM HARVARD, STUDIED ONE YEAR AT PEKING UNIVERSITY

CAREER: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ANNA AND JOHN J. SIE FOUNDATION, 3300 E. FIRST AVE., SUITE 390, DENVER, CO 80206, 303-468-6666, WWW.COLORADOJETSET.COM

WHERE YOU CALL HOME: A SMALLISH HOME IN BONNIE BRAE, AND AN ADULT SPACE/LOFT DOWNTOWN FOR HOLDING CHARITABLE EVENTS AND HANGING ART

MICHELLE SIE WHITTEN initially followed in the footsteps of her father, a cable TV executive. After starting a family, she turned her attention to philanthropy as executive director of her family's charitable foundation, the Anna and John J. Sie Foundation.

CE: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CAREER.

MW: I was blessed to have worked in the cable industry during its heyday. I built a small team of professionals who helped me build a modest media company in Asia. We still have a strong office in Beijing, China, with about 40 or 50 staff. We had a ton of fun and worked ourselves silly. I used to spend 80 percent of my time on the road.

When I became pregnant I knew I had to change my work life and it was just amazing serendipity that my parents started their family foundation about the same time I gave birth to my first child, Sophia.

CE: WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER PATH?

MW: Well, growing up as a "cable baby," it just made a lot of sense to me. I did a lot of summer internships with various cable channels and really enjoyed it. Then I went to graduate school to become an anthropologist and realized that I not only enjoyed business but that business is what I should be doing! My father did guide me in this direction and insisted that at the same time I was studying funeral rituals in southern Asia that I took

INTERVIEW BY: VICTORIA SMITH

business courses each summer. My father's a pretty insightful guy.

My second career was a no-brainer as well. It allowed me to stay home more but was still demanding and challenging. I love working in philanthropy and yes, I still have not found life balance yet.

CE: DO YOU HAVE A MENTOR?

MW: My first mentor was Peter Barton, who helped me get my first business started in Asia—Asia Television and Communications LLC, an early (small)



PHOTO: JASON GRUBB

subsidiary of Liberty. After Peter, my father became my mentor and I started working directly for him. In my new charitable position, I have the folks at The Denver Foundation, Sharon Magness Blake, Daniel Ritchie and fabulous folks who are so giving of their time and input in terms of how to make this world a better place. Finally, I should add my mother. She has mentored me in different ways. As a mother, as a giver, and as a storyteller.

CE: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

MW: I am first-generation Italian-Chinese American. My mother emigrated from Italy when she was 11 years old and my father emigrated

from China when he was about 14. My parents came here with very little—my father was in an orphanage for a time—but ultimately they lived the American dream. I am the fourth of five children and I am close to all four of my siblings.

CE: WHAT ABOUT THE FOUNDATION?

MW: The Anna and John J. Sie Foundation (AJSF) was founded in 2004 by my parents and is a private family foundation. The foundation provides support to over 50 public nonprofits in Colorado each year and we cover a broad spectrum based on the interests of the co-trustees.

CE: WHO RECEIVES AJSF FUNDS?

Some examples of establishment grants include funding the Anna Maglione Sie Endowed Chair in Italian Culture at the University of Denver, the Maria and Tommaso Maglione Italian Filmmaker Award endowment through the Denver Film Society, the Chinese Executive Media Management Program at the Daniel's College of Business, and the

EVENT: WITH A BE BEAUTIFUL—BE YOURSELF THEME, THE EVENT FEATURES QUINCY JONES AND SIXTEEN CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME AND SIX ADULTS WITH DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES MODELING SAKS FIFTH AVENUE FASHIONS ALONGSIDE SPORTS PERSONALITIES AND DENVER NUGGETS DANCERS.

WHEN: OCT. 10, 2009

WHERE: XJET AIR HANGAR, CENTENNIAL AIRPORT

BENEFICIARY: THE LINDA CRNIC INSTITUTE FOR DOWN SYNDROME

TICKETS: 303-468-6663,
WWW.COLORADOJETSET.COM

1 MICHELLE SIE WHITTEN RECEIVING KISSES FROM GRETCHEN BECHTOLT AND DAUGHTER SOPHIA

2 MICHELLE SIE WHITTEN WITH HER FATHER JOHN J. SIE AND SON PATRICK 3 MICHELLE WITH HUSBAND TOM, HER FATHER JOHN J. (HOLDING SOPHIA) AND HER MOTHER ANNA (HOLDING PATRICK)

establishment of the Linda Crnic Institute for Down Syndrome (a partnership between The Children's Hospital, the CE-Denver School of Medicine and CU-Boulder).

CE: DO YOU HOST FUNDRAISERS?

MW: AJSF is hosting a charity fashion show to benefit the Linda Crnic Institute for Down Syndrome (see above).



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PHOTO: JASON GRUBB

CE: WHAT IS THE STATUS OF DOWN SYNDROME RESEARCH?

MW: Down syndrome is the least funded developmental condition by the National Institute of Health. With technology today, within five to 10

years, scientists say that with even modest funding for Down syndrome we could be making medical and cognitive breakthroughs that would represent a 10-point difference in IQ, which for most people with Down syndrome is the difference between living independently and having a job or not.

CE: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU'VE LEARNED AS A MOM?

MW: Wow. I have learned so many things. With Sophia, I learned not to put limits on things (she can do anything!) and at the same time to not to

impose my expectations (she may not be PhD, type A, Nobel Laureate). Part of that was because Sophia was my first child but a big part was also the Down syndrome. It made me truly hone in on her happiness, her strengths and her true potential versus what I just wanted to see.

I have also learned from having Patrick—making it two to one when I am alone with them—that time is not a linear thing and that I have to play with it, circle it and readjust what punctuality is in certain settings.

Finally, from day one of being a parent. I have found a reservoir of patience and gentleness that I never knew I had before, even under the most trying circumstances.

1 BRETT PERRY WITH SON CHASE, THE 2009 AMBASSADOR FOR THE JET SET FASHION SHOW

Women
WHO'VE CHANGED THE
Heart
OF THE CITY

Denver Rescue Mission would like to express heartfelt gratitude to these remarkable women who've changed the heart of the city.

Tamara Banks • Dr. Patricia Gabow
Jean Galloway • Georgia Imhoff
Cleo Parker Robinson

**DENVER
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*For more information about Denver Rescue Mission,
visit www.DenverRescueMission.org.*