

# James E. Bagg, Jr.: Editor *par Excellence* Retires

Herbert L. Fred, MD, MACP

**A**fter 31 years as an editor of the *Texas Heart Institute Journal*, James E. Bagg, Jr., retired in May 2017 at the age of 74. His work during that span was exemplary, earning him deep respect and admiration. There will never be another like Jim.

## Pursuing an Education

Jim was born in New Orleans in 1942 and grew up on his family's plantation outside of Natchez, Mississippi. He graduated *cum laude* from the College of William & Mary in 1964 with a degree in English, and he earned a master's degree in English from Tufts University 4 years later. His first job was writing advertising copy in New York City for John Wiley & Sons Scientific Publications. He soon returned to academia,

entering English doctoral programs, first at Tufts and then at the University of Texas at Austin. During his time in Austin, he taught English to the university's freshmen.

For a number of reasons, chief of which was a strong desire to edit, Jim gave up his quest for a doctorate and became the editor of a magazine, the *Texas Public Employee*. After a short stint in that role, he accepted the job of editing *The Library Chronicle*, the official journal of the University of Texas at Austin's Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center.

## The Next Milestone

In November 1979, Jim moved to Galveston, Texas, where he spent 3 years working for the University of Texas Medical Branch, editing course catalogs and other publications for the Schools of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health Sciences. He then spent the next 3 years teaching English composition in local colleges, universities, and the Texas prison system.

## Fate Comes Calling

In the summer of 1986, Jim applied for an editing position at the Texas Heart Institute. During his first interview, he was given 30 badly written sentences to correct on the spot. After passing that test, he was given a medical manuscript that had been rejected because of its poor organization, terrible writing, and dubious recommendations for patient care. Jim's task was to take the manuscript home, put it into an acceptable form, and return it in a week. He excelled in that task. As a result, he was offered 2 choices: begin work immediately in the entry-level job for which he had applied, or wait 2 months and become the executive editor of the *Texas Heart Institute Journal* when his predecessor retired. Either offer would require him to commute 570 miles a week to work in Houston. Undeterred by that requirement, he opted to wait for the executive editorship. The rest is history.



James E. Bagg, Jr.

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Editor of the Texas Heart  
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### Establishing a Legacy

Once on board, Jim was an unquestionable success. His devotion to duty, standard of excellence, and overall proficiency marked him as a rare talent. He always did his job quietly, avoiding the spotlight whenever possible and never raising his voice. And he always treated his associates and authors with the utmost kindness and respect.

As one of his countless authors, I quickly recognized Jim's prowess. Of the 80 articles that I published in the *Texas Heart Institute Journal* during his tenure, none escaped the magic of his editorial pen, despite my relentless efforts to provide him with "nothing-needs-changing" manuscripts.

One final point. Publishing more than 400 articles in other prominent medical journals has placed me in close and repeated contact with numerous editors. The good ones were supportive and efficient. The outstanding ones treated any submission of mine as if it were their own, pondering every little detail and often suggesting an excellent word in place of a good one. Among all those top editors, Jim leads the pack.

### A Farewell Message

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Dear Jim,

As a retiree, you can stop repairing manuscripts and start devoting more time to your avocation—reading. We hope that the next phase of your life will be as rewarding and successful as your career with us has been. May your retirement do for you what you have done for the medical literature. No one will ever replace your editing style and skill set.

Godspeed.

*Herbert L. Fred, MD, MACP*