

In Memoriam: James E. Bagg, Jr. (1942–2020)

The *Texas Heart Institute Journal* reports the death of James Erskine “Jim” Bagg, Jr., its longtime Executive Editor, on 2 December 2020 at age 78 years.

Jim was born 28 July 1942 in New Orleans, Louisiana, and grew up on his family’s Mississippi plantation. On his mother’s side, he was the great-grandson of Confederate Civil War general John Bell Hood. Jim graduated *cum laude* from the College of William & Mary in 1964 with a degree in English. In 1968, he earned a master’s degree in that field from Tufts University. After some time writing advertising copy for publisher John Wiley & Sons, he pursued doctoral studies in English at Tufts and later at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin.

Bitten by the editing bug, Jim abandoned academic study to edit *Texas Public Employee* magazine and then *The Library Chronicle* at UT Austin. In late 1979, he moved to Galveston, Texas, where for the next 3 years he edited course catalogues and other materials at UT Medical Branch. Then, for 3 years he taught English composition at local institutions of higher learning and in the Texas prison system.

Fate took a turn in summer 1986 when Jim applied for an editing position at the Texas Heart Institute (THI) and was hired instead as the *Journal’s* Executive Editor.¹ For the next 3 decades, he commuted daily between Galveston and Houston to carry out his duties.

Sedate, composed, and self-confident without fanfare, Jim methodically improved the *Journal’s* reputation and reach. He redesigned it, worked tirelessly to get it accepted into *Index Medicus* so that its contents would be available in PubMed, and convinced the THI administration that all articles appearing in the *Journal* should be completely available at no charge to PubMed readers. When the *Journal* expanded beyond 2 staff editors, Jim retained his policy that all should read each other’s article proofs and make constructive comments, which would then be compiled and implemented before proofs went to their authors. The *Journal* maintains this practice.

Four articles that Jim wrote for the *Journal* during his long tenure achieved PubMed listing.²⁻⁵ Two^{4,5} were collaborations with a man of particularly high standards of writing,⁶ the *Journal’s* Associate Editor, Dr. Herbert L. Fred, who respected Jim and his abilities without qualification and was not shy about saying so.¹

Jim worked well alone but appreciated and supported his associates. His colleague of 25 years, Sharon Caldwell, describes him as a generous and patient teacher and mentor. He not only fostered her development from editorial assistant to, ultimately, his suc-



James E. Bagg, Jr.

cessor as Managing Editor, but also gave her freedom to implement more efficient office systems, including moving the *Journal’s* submission and review process to the Editorial Manager platform. Jim also spearheaded job promotions for other personnel through the years.

Quiet though he was, Jim enjoyed a good joke and wasn’t above chortling when something really amused him. He gave people hilarious birthday cards, often inserting cartoons. He took mischievous delight in giving Sharon birthday cards in Spanish, knowing well that she didn’t read or speak the language. Once, he gave several colleagues a “Black Death—European Tour” T-shirt featuring a large rat on the front and a list of European locales and their 14th-century bubonic plague dates on the back.

Jim was kind and caring. He listened to personal problems and responded with circumspect insight, and he always had a doctor or a good book to recommend. In 2008, when I ran into seemingly insurmountable difficulty securing a United States immigration visa for my Ecuadorian fiancée, Jim wrote a letter to the U.S. consular officers in Ecuador in support of my efforts and permitted my special emergency trip there to resolve the issue face to face. Animals, too, benefited greatly from his soft heart; he was devoted to a succession of Siamese cats throughout his life and cared for numerous strays outside.

Jim also weathered professional and literal storms with grace. He rose to the occasion when his house,

built in the 1880s and a rare survivor of the terrible Galveston hurricane in 1900, took on 8 feet of water from Hurricane Ike's storm surge in 2008. Despite general devastation, mandatory evacuation, and lengthy dislocation, Jim reacted with characteristic determination and calm during the 3-year restoration period. All the while, he kept the *Journal* running smoothly.

Jim's patience was not infinite, however. Highly political, he was a fervent Democrat. He often criticized his local newspaper, *The Galveston County Daily News*, for its frequent editing and proofreading errors. As Jim might observe wryly if given one last chance, the newspaper misspelled his middle name in the title of his own obituary.⁷

Jim was preceded in death by his husband, Robert Brinson Bass, and is survived by his sister, Barbara Bagg Sulavic. I and the many who knew and worked with him will remember him with gratitude and respect.

Acknowledgment

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