



EDITOR:

I have been meaning to write *Engineering & Science* about this for some time now, but haven't gotten around to it. A while back, that revered alumni magazine published a special anniversary issue. In an array of covers reproduced therein, there was one of an unidentified undergraduate waving goodbye to the two human figures on the space-bound Pioneer 10 plaque that someone had caricatured on a construction wall near the Beckman Auditorium (volume 35, number 5, March-April 1972).

I am proud to have been that cordial undergraduate. It all happened late one sunny afternoon a week or two before the issue came out. I had just driven onto the campus when the *E&S* photographer, Floyd Clark, who happened to be an acquaintance of mine because of my involvement with the Caltech Y, strolled by and recruited me for the task. I'd like to take credit for the idea, but I can't; it was hatched entirely in the mind of Floyd Clark (except for my use of the peace sign instead of a conventional wave). A couple of passes along the sidewalk and I had done my first (and so far, alas, my only) cover! Coincidentally, I had just driven in from JPL where, under the supervision of JPL Historian R. Cargill Hall, I had been working on a paper on the history of solid propellant rocketry, so it was only appropriate that I should have paused after such space-oriented work to bid farewell to the two soon-to-be space travelers. That assignment finished, I then proceeded to a session in Baxter Hall with my advisor, Daniel J. Kevles, whose good counsel helped

launch me (ahem!) on my own unusual trajectory as a historian of science and technology.

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EDITOR:

Your paragraph on the death of W. R. Smythe at age 95 was, perhaps inevitably, a too perfunctory notice of a career of the greatest significance for Caltech. Professor Smythe set the standards, and maintained the continuity of quality, of the Physics Department from the era of Uncle Bobbie through the fifties. He was friend, mentor and judge of all the graduate students, not just those whose research he supervised. His famous required course in electromagnetism, and successive editions of his splendid text, were our essential introduction to an intuitive, physical, understanding of field physics, and to the analytical methods of mathematical physics. His personal encouragement meant much to me.

Professor Smythe was inflexibly honest, rational, decent, and both scientifically and physically tough. A proper biography will mention his military service in the Philippines, his long association with R. A. Millikan, his tennis matches with the Athenaeum houseboys. In later years many noticed his noontime laps in the swimming pool. He will still be long remembered.

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