

**EDWARD
HUTCHINGS JR.
1912 — 2003**

Edward Hutchings Jr., who edited this magazine from 1948 to 1979, died December 8 in Sonoma, California, at the age of 91.

It was Hutchings who made *Engineering & Science* into a vehicle for “understandable science,” a rare commodity when he became its editor. The magazine had been born in 1937 as the *Caltech Alumni Review*, managed by alumni. In 1948, with a new name and increased funds from the Institute, a “professional journalist of top rank” was sought to run it, although the character of the reincarnated magazine had not been determined.

Hutchings determined it. He didn’t think it ought to be just another alumni magazine: “I always figured that what the alumni—from this kind of a place, especially—wanted to read was what everybody wanted to read,” he wrote, years later. “Like the science editor of the *New York Times*, they want to know: What are we doing here? How good is it? Who’s doing it? How important is it? They don’t want to know that Joe Blow had a baby.” And he had a theory for explaining science: “I tried to get people to write so that I could understand it.”

Hutchings was born in

Brooklyn in 1912 and graduated from Dartmouth College in 1933. After a string of Depression jobs (as a bank teller, bookkeeper, and door-to-door distributor of All-Bran samples), he landed in the magazine business and never left. He had published a few short stories, but considered his “career proper” to have started at the *Literary Digest*, where he “developed great respect for good proof-reading” by running a department called “Slips That Pass in the Type.” He wrote for a magazine called *Tide*, then became news editor of *Business Week*, associate editor of *Look*, and executive editor of *Liberty*, in succession.

When Chuck Newton, assistant to Caltech’s president, Lee DuBridge, went to New York hunting for a “professional journalist of top rank,” he found Hutchings working as managing editor of an experimental magazine called *Science Illustrated*. Hutchings accepted the job offer and moved to Pasadena.

For his unique take on “this understandable science business,” Hutchings and the magazine began to collect awards. For several years in the late ’60s and early ’70s, it ranked among the top 10 alumni magazines in the country. In 1969, a special

issue on the environment won the *Newsweek* alumni-publication award for achievement in presenting public affairs.

In an article summing up his work on *Engineering & Science* when he retired in 1979, Hutchings wrote: “The level of understanding at which an article in *E&S* was written has fluctuated from issue to issue—even from article to article. This was inevitable, because every article has been to some extent a compromise. While I have done all I could to direct and edit the article so as to keep it as simple as possible, the author has often gone to great lengths to keep the level of understanding as high as possible. What was finally published represented the point at which any particular compromise reached its farthest limits on each side. Or sometimes, what was finally published merely represented the point at which time ran out on us.”

(Hutchings’s legacy lives on; this is still true.)

Jackie Bonner, who worked with Hutchings on *E&S* for 14 years and succeeded him as editor, recalled his fascination with words, his flawless taste, and his “perfect pitch.” She wrote at the time of his retirement of his belief in

“using simple, straightforward language. . . . One of his fetishes is that quotations must be worth quoting and sound as if real people had actually said them.” In addition to editing *E&S*, wrote Bonner, “he has also compulsively edited every other piece of written matter that has come into his hands and much of the conversation he has heard. He edits, for example, his own and other people’s letters and memos, newspaper headlines and articles, *The California Tech*, manuscripts, transcripts, books, plays; everything his eye happens to light on is grist for his editing mill. Some men are born with a silver spoon in their mouths; Ed must have been born with a blue pencil in his right hand.”

After he retired as editor, he stayed at Caltech teaching journalism, acting as adviser to *The California Tech*, participating in musical theater and Playreaders, and swimming religiously. Hutchings also played an instrumental role in making a best-seller out of Richard Feynman. For articles in *E&S*, he had persuaded Feynman, who, Hutchings claimed, never wrote anything, to allow his public lectures to be recorded and transcribed. As Hutchings told it, when he first showed him a transcript, Feynman was appalled, and from then on gladly worked with the editor to “turn his chaotic transcript into a publishable article. . . . *E&S* and Richard Feynman soon became a mutual admiration society, and Feynman got to calling me ‘my publisha.’”

Ralph Leighton, Feynman’s drumming partner, had also recorded many Feynman stories, but was having trouble turning them into a written version that “didn’t change the unique flavor of Feynman’s storytelling,” says Leighton. “I got on-the-job

training from an elegant, cheerful, patient, and supremely talented man who knew how to make a sentence read like you were hearing it spoken to you—even though it started out as two fragments, or three run-ons with no verb-tense agreement.”

Meanwhile, Ed Barber, then senior editor and now vice president at W. W. Norton and Company, having heard of the physicist’s “fabulous stories,” had been unsuccessfully pursuing the legendary Feynman for years. “Then a bright editorial angel stepped in,” recounts Barber. “I happened to meet Ed Hutchings, a small man in a small office, but large in grace and information.” Several more years later, Hutchings called him with a description of Leighton’s transcribed stories and brokered a meeting with “the Professor” himself—a meeting in which the joker from Long Island accused Barber (from Mississippi) of being “a city slicker from New York . . . ready to take us to the cleaners.” Hutchings smoothed everything over, and the rest, says Barber, “is happy publishing history. The Professor, Ralph, and Ed [Hutchings] produced the best-seller *Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman!*, then another,

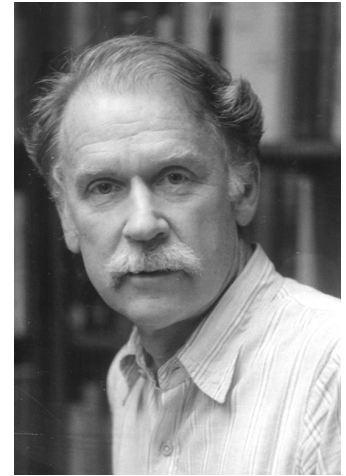
What Do You Care What Other People Think?” (Leighton produced a third, *Tuva or Bust!*, after Feynman’s death.)

“I shall always be thankful to Ed for showing me how to polish a good sentence and to enjoy a good life,” Leighton says.

Hutchings and Barber also remained friends long after their publishing venture. “This gentle man wore his grace, discernment, and good cheer to the very end,” says Barber. “I thought him noble—and so much fun.”

In 1987 Hutchings retired to Creekside Village in Sonoma, where he originated the Creekside Playreaders and was particularly beloved for his song-and-dance routines in more than 10 years of performing in the Creekside Follies. His wife, Elizabeth, died in 2000; he is survived by his daughter, Alison McAlpine, and son, David. Donations in his memory may be made to the Sonoma Valley Regional Library, 755 W. Napa St., Sonoma, CA 95476.

Bonner quoted a former colleague as saying, “If they don’t tie him down, he’ll edit his own obituary.” Well, he didn’t; and I humbly hope, Ed, that there are no typos, factual errors, or infelicities of language here. □—JD



PETER W. FAY
1924 — 2004

Peter W. Fay, professor of history, emeritus, died January 18 at his home in Sierra Madre after a long illness. He was 79.

Fay, an authority on China and India, was a member of the Caltech faculty from 1955 until his retirement in 1997. He earned his bachelor’s degree (interrupted by service in Italy during World War II) from Harvard in 1947, attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, and returned to Harvard for his PhD (1954).

Among his books were *The Opium War, 1840–1842*, which won several prizes following its publication in 1975, and *The Forgotten Army: India’s Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942–1945* (see *E&S*, Spring 1994). Two years at the Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur in the ’60s, where he helped the humanities program, had shaped his interest in and love for Indian history.

He is survived by his wife, Mariette Robertson Fay; sons Todor, Jonathan, and Benjamin; daughters Jennifer and Lisa Fay Matthiessen; and seven grandchildren. A memorial service is planned. □