



IN MEMORIAM

Clay Felker
Lecturer and Specialist in Journalism
UC Berkeley
1925 – 2008

Clay Felker, a legendary magazine editor and the founder of the eponymous Felker Magazine Center at the University of California, Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism, died July 1, 2008, at the age of 82, at his home in Manhattan.

Neil Henry, dean of the journalism school, described Felker as “a treasure,” saying that he brought “tremendous passion, dignity, and deep conviction about the importance of journalism in American society to his teaching” and that he “shared his remarkable background and wisdom as a journalism pioneer with his students at North Gate as if they were equal partners in the enterprise of publishing a magazine from concept to the printer.” The school’s magazine program features editing workshops that pair students for a semester with some of the best editors in the country, as well as visits from top magazine journalists who teach workshops and courses. It has also continued to publish magazines and online narrative features.

Felker was born in Webster Groves, Missouri, in 1925. His father, Carl, was the managing editor of *The Sporting News*; his mother, Cora Tyree Felker, had been women’s editor of *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* before having children. Felker attended Duke University, where he edited the student newspaper, *The Duke Chronicle*. He left college in 1943 to join the Navy before returning to graduate in 1951.

Felker’s accomplishments were many. He was the editor and publisher of *New York* magazine, which he launched as a Sunday supplement to *The New York Herald Tribune* in 1964 and took independent in 1969. *The New York Times* later said he was a “visionary” who was “widely credited with inventing the formula for the modern magazine, and giving it energetic expression in a glossy weekly named for and devoted to the boisterous city that fascinated him — New York.” Magazines modeling themselves on *New York* sprang up all over the country. The magazine was eventually purchased by media mogul Rupert Murdoch. *The Village Voice*, bought by Felker in 1974, and *New West*, a creative and award-winning West Coast version of *New York* that Felker began in 1975, also were eventually made part of the Murdoch empire.

Felker helped to develop the New Journalism of the 1960s — the use of techniques inherited from realist novelists such as multiple transitions in time, place and point of view, and attention to status details — to give reporting depth and emotional punch, as reflected in the writings of such New York contributors as Jimmy Breslin and Hunter S. Thompson and, most notably, Tom Wolfe.

Along the way, Felker was editor at publications that included *Esquire* and *Adweek*. He also developed *Manhattan Inc.*, a magazine that (he told *The San Francisco Chronicle*) “was founded on the premise that investment bankers were the rock stars of the 1980s” before it foundered in the wake of the stock market crash of 1987 and folded three years later. “Magazines die when tastes change,” Felker was quoted as saying in a 2002 issue of the Graduate School of Journalism’s *North Gate News*. “When young people come up with new generational ideas, new values, new magazines come up.”

Thomas Goldstein, the director of Berkeley's Media Studies program and dean of the journalism school from 1988 to 1996, talked with Felker in the early 1990s about a role for him at North Gate Hall. "He had decided that he wanted to spend his next act in the West," recalled Goldstein, noting Felker's keen interest in Silicon Valley and high- tech.

Felker joined the Berkeley faculty as a lecturer in 1994, and the Graduate School of Journalism established the endowed Felker Magazine Center a year later. He and his wife, Gail Sheehy, moved to Berkeley in 1995, although they maintained a residence in Manhattan. Felker was stricken with cancer of the throat and mouth but survived a long battle with the illness while continuing to teach and inspire.

In a television interview with Charlie Rose on PBS, Felker described his pleasure at Berkeley in teaching students "... on fire with the idea of having a magazine, just as I was." Jack Roberts, one of two former students who cofounded a print and internet based magazine, called Bad Idea, in London, wrote: "Perhaps he recognized something of his own past in what we were doing — young editors and writers in their twenties and thirties, taking risks, chasing down the stories they think are interesting and significant, and to hell with the consequences. For us learning from him invested great confidence for the battles ahead; the news of his death brought a sense of deep loss, and the knowledge that journalism had said farewell to one of its titans."

A memorial celebration, with a jazz band and singer Judy Collins, hosted by David Frost, was held in Manhattan, attended by many well- known New York writers and literary figures. A celebration of Felker's contributions to UC Berkeley was held at the journalism school during Alumni Weekend March 2009.

Felker is survived by his wife, Gail Sheehy; a sister, Charlotte Gallagher; a daughter, Mohm Sheehy of Cambridge; and a stepdaughter, Maura Sheehy Moss of Brooklyn; and three step- grandchildren.

Deirdre

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