

Contingencies

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Priceless

DWIGHT BARTLETT, who serves on the *Contingencies* editorial board, alerted me recently to the death of longtime Academy member Ralph Edwards.

Edwards, who was also a fellow of the Society of Actuaries (SOA) and a member of its predecessor organization, the American Institute of Actuaries, passed away on April 2, 2008, at the age of 96. In a brief obituary note, Bartlett detailed Edwards' accomplishments over the course of his long career. For a number of years, he was the senior actuary for Baltimore Life Insurance Co. In the 1950s, he founded the Baltimore Actuaries Club, and he functioned as its secretary for several decades. Edwards also served a term as Academy secretary (in 1976-1977) and as president of the Middle Atlantic Actuarial Club.

But his most important contribution to the profession, Bartlett wrote, was as the creator, writer, editor, and publisher of an informal newsletter, *Actuarial Record*. Published from January 1964 to January 1967, Edwards' lively circular came into being at a time when the only other regular actuarial publications were the scholarly *Transactions of the Society of Actuaries* and similar annuals from the SOA's sister organizations.

"Ralph perceived the need for a more topical, timely, personal, and even humorous newsletter," Bartlett wrote. "Inspired by his effort, the professional organizations began to develop their own publications, leading off with the SOA's *The Actuary* and culminating in the large array of professional actuarial publications we have today, highlighted by *Contingencies*."

I didn't know Ralph, but I like to think he might have enjoyed the splash that the September/October issue of *Contingencies* made in the recent election. Within a few weeks of publication, references to articles written by the two presidential candidates on health care reform were percolating in blogs and chat rooms. The tipping point came when Paul Krugman mentioned *Contingencies* in a Sept. 19 *New York Times* online column and *Good Morning America* picked up on it (with an arresting 15-second visual of the magazine cover flying across the screen) in a segment that ran on Sept. 21.

From that point until the celebrity baton was passed to Joe the Plumber, *Contingencies* and the Academy were a daily presence in articles, columns, and television news programs around the world. The magazine even got a cameo shout-out from Sen. Joe Biden in the vice presidential debate when he referred to Sen. John McCain's "article in a major magazine."

Jonathan Alter, MSNBC's political analyst, tried his best to burst *Contingencies'* bubble when he reported on Sept. 22 that *Contingencies* was "a magazine that is perfect for insomnia," one that "nobody actually reads." Snarkiness aside, I would like to argue that, at least on his latter point, Alter got it wrong.

Over the course of the past year, I've learned just how much *Contingencies* readers are paying attention—a lot. Not only do you manage to stay awake while reading the magazine; you're frequently moved to respond to what you've read. One issue's "Commentary" becomes the springboard for a subsequent issue's "Tradecraft" when a reader takes the concept and runs with it. A letter to the editor morphs into a full-blown feature on a related topic that, in its turn, generates further letters to the editor. The "Puzzles" and "Cryptic Crossword," no matter how diabolically devised, always get solved.

To prove my point about your engagement with the magazine, I'm willing to put some money on the line in the form of a *Contingencies* fiction contest. Dust off your pen (or your word processor), and compose a 2,000- to 3,000-word work of short fiction centering on the theme of managing risk. The subject can be risk of any kind—financial, moral, mortal, personal, global—and how the protagonist manages it. It can be serious or humorous, realistic or fanciful. The deadline is April 17 (do your taxes first). The winning entry will be published in the July/August issue of the magazine, and its author will receive a \$100 gift certificate to Amazon.com and the satisfaction of proving that Alter doesn't know what he's talking about when it comes to *Contingencies*. The value of that last one? Priceless. ●

Linda Mallon